

THREE

S E R M O N S

UPON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS;

FROM THE FOLLOWING TEXTS:

I. Luke xv. 5. *And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulder, rejoicing.*

II. John v. 6. *When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now*

a long time in that case, he said unto him, wilt thou be made whole? &c.

III. Psalm lxxv. 5. *By terrible things in righteousness, wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation.*

PREACHED AT THE

New-Church in *Langeitho, South-Wales.*

By the Rev. Mr. DANIEL ROWLAND.

Chaplain to his Grace the DUKE of LEINSTER, one of his Majesty's most Hon. Privy Council in the Kingdom of Ireland.

AND

Now attempted to be translated from the Original British,

By the Rev. JOHN DAVIES,

Rector of SHARNCOTE, WILTS; and late of St. EDMUND HALL, OXFORD, who translated the former Eight Sermons.

L O N D O N :

Printed for the EDITOR, THOMAS DAVIES, No. 19, Eyre-street, Cold-bath-fields: Sold also by J. BUCKLAND, Pater-noster-row; W. WATTS, Windmill-hill, Moorfields; J. MATHEWS, No. 13, Strand; and T. VALLANCE, No. 20, Cheapside; also in Bristol by MILLS, POWELL, and HILL; CRAWFORD, Dublin; and by most Booksellers in Town and Country. 1778.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

CHRISTIAN READERS,

HAD it been needful, the following Sermons might have been recommended by some of the ablest gospel ministers in England; the author's name is well known by many as the most laborious and successful minister in Wales, for about forty years: though in the eve of life he travels through most of the counties yearly, to spread abroad the riches of God's grace, his bow abides in strength. No places, though some are very large, are capable to hold his auditories, either at home or abroad: It is well known that he is not ambitious for worldly things, but to be made wise to win souls to Jesus Christ. He receives no benefit from the sale of any of his books; he generously gave me the copies; many besides myself have experienced his benevolent help; above a hundred preachers in Wales esteem him as their father, most of whom meet four times a year to consult with him about the most likely means of promoting the Redeemer's Interest. He administers the Lord's Supper to thousands monthly, four sermons are preached that day and the foregoing, and it is not uncommon to see some there of the distance of 50 miles and upwards, their continuance in coming testify that their journeys are not in vain.

I am much obliged to the numerous subscribers of the former eight sermons, and those who have kindly bespoke for some of these; also to the translator for his pains, who though engaged in his churches, and increasing congregations, sent weekly copies for the press. Considering the particular idiom of the Welch language, his pains and abilities were great to keep any thing near to the spirit and meaning of the author. As he could not attend to correct the press, any errata must be laid to my charge, I can only say I have done my best. It has swelled much larger than expected, else should have rendered them cheaper, but I hope none will deem them dear as they are something under half the price that sermons are sold in general, so that they might come easier to the poor, and the rich who are merciful to souls, may buy, to give away.

I had an intention to have the author's print, but I have desisted; it is to appear soon in the Gospel Magazine, with wishes that those sermons may be a blessing to precious souls, beg leave to subscribe myself,

Your obliged Servant,

London, Eyre Street, No. 29.

May 9, 1778.

T. DAVIES.

N. B. The Editor has a few of the Eight sermons unsold, which may be bound up with these, price Two Shillings. And may be had at No. 29, Eyre street, Cold-bath-fields, London; or at Haverford-West, South Wales.



S E R M O N I.

L U K E X V. 5.

And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing.

IN this parable our blessed Saviour compares our fallen race to a lost sheep. And indeed there is no image in nature that can more justly set forth our ruined state than that of a strayed sheep, which hath left the fold, and roved into a barren wilderness. As there is no creature more prone to run astray than a sheep, so there is none that hath less skill to find her way home again when she is gone astray. Even the very swine have more thought than she seems to have: for, however far they may wander in the day, they will all return in the evening to the trough where they have been usually fed. But a sheep, that hath once strayed from the herd, rushes headlong from one danger to the other, till she is either starved to death or devoured by beasts of prey; unless she is soon missed by the shepherd, and diligently sought till he hath found her and brought her back. In this sense we are all by nature like a lost sheep. In the language of the evangelical prophet—"We have all gone astray like sheep, and have turned every one to his own way." *Isa. liii. 6.* Yes, as Peter adopts these words and ap-

plies them to prove the same point—"We were
 "all as sheep going astray." And the holy Psal-
 mist asserts the same truth in terms which are
 equally expressive, when he saith—"They are all
 "gone aside: they are all together become filthy:
 "there is none that doeth good, no, not one,"
Psal. xiv. 3. But why should I multiply texts of
 scripture, when it is so clear from the whole tenour
 of the book of God, and so undeniably plain from
 woeful experience, that all mankind, whether
 they be Jews or Gentiles, "have sinned, and come
 "short of the glory of God." Oh! how should
 this view of our undone condition humble us to
 the dust before the Lord, and make us to hate
 ourselves for our pride, self-conceit, and contempt
 of others! Alas! who or what are we, that we
 should assume any airs of self-importance! were
 not the best of us by nature lost, wandering from
 the fold of God like strayed sheep. And had not
 the good shepherd sought and found us, we should
 have been still in the parched desert, pining with
 disease or perishing with hunger, but glory be to
 his name he did find us and "lay us on his shoul-
 "ders, rejoicing." In treating farther upon these
 words, my aim shall be to lay open the lost state
 of every unconverted sinner, and to enumerate
 some of the false props by which he tries to up-
 hold himself, without having recourse to the Sa-
 viour: that having shewn him his vileness and
 utter insufficiency to save himself, I may direct
 him to those blessed *shoulders*, which alone can
 sustain his guilt and carry his burthens. O that
 the good shepherd would this day descend into
 this wilderness, in all the power of his victorious
 grace, and in all the attractions of his love, that
 some prodigals may be reclaimed, and some stray-
 ed

ed sheep may be layed on his shoulders rejoicing!

The source of all our misery is the disobedience of our first parents. In Adam we all sinned. Then our nature was tainted, and our blood was defiled. As we are begotten after his image, so we partake of his corruptions. This is our natural inheritance. "We are conceived in iniquity, and born in sin," With great propriety therefore doth the word of God declare, "that we are estranged from the womb, and go astray as soon as we are born, speaking lies," *Psal. lviii. 3.* Very early did our defection begin. From the cradle do we err. We even then choose the evil and refuse the good. And as we grow up, still this wicked bias is nourished by example till it is often transformed into sinful habit. Such is our state when we are left to ourselves, or before the good shepherd hath come after us and found us. We leave the green pastures of God for the naked rocks of the desert, and exchange things excellent and glorious for such as are mean and contemptible. With *Adam* we prefer a momentary gust of sensual pleasure, before an eternity of spiritual bliss—the fruit of a tree, before the favour of God. With *Esau* we sell our birthright, with all its noble appendages, for a mess of pottage. And with the *Gergesenes* we scruple not to barter our interest in Christ, for the safety of our swine or the perishing part of our nature—our royal dignity in heaven, for a small portion of this earth. Yes, "we have all committed two very great evils: We have not only forsaken the fountain of living waters, but we have hewed out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns which can hold no water." *Jer. ii. 13.* Being thus alienated from the life of God,

we err in every thing that we do. We err in our praying—in our hearing—in our preaching—in our alms giving, and in our forgiveness of injuries. There is such a perverse spirit in “us as “causes us,” in the language of the prophet, “to err in every work as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit,” *Isa.* xix. 14. And oh! we have not only wandered from the Lord, but we take pleasure in our wanderings. We delight in sin. We glory in our shame. We mind earthly things, to the exclusion of all concern for our souls. We make a mock of godliness. In this mass of corruption we all lie, till the Spirit of holiness moves upon the face of our hearts, and creates us anew in Christ Jesus. And oh! should not a sense of our depravity fill us with horror, and overwhelm us with shame and confusion! But here some may be ready to bless themselves and say—“we plead not guilty against this heavy “charge, which you have brought against us: “for, though we are sinners, yet we have never “run into such lengths of wickedness as you have “been describing.” It may be so: but do not you observe, my friends, in my text, that not only *dogs* and *swine*, but *sheep* may be lost—that not only great and profligate sinners, but the comparatively moral and upright may be in a perishing condition. Persons may be outwardly decent and formally religious, while they are yet far from the way of happiness. They may be polite in their carriage—soft and pliable in their tempers—honest in their dealings—and free from gross vices, while they are still but lost sheep and have no lot in the gospel salvation. With all their seeming harmlessness they may still die in their sins, if the good shepherd doth not find them, that

he

he may quicken them by his grace, wash them in his blood, cloath them with his righteousness, and sanctify them by his Spirit. Was not the boastful pharisee a person of this stamp? *Luke xviii. 11:* "I thank God," saith he, "that I am not as other men are. I am no extortioner—no unjust person—no adulterer—no poor publican, who is obliged to sue for mercy as a free gift or to perish for ever. No: I have not only a negative but positive sanctity. I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that I possess." Here was a man who had very clear skin and clean conscience in his own apprehension. He had not one fault or infirmity belonging to him, but was covered from head to foot with a white fleece of his own produce. But notwithstanding all his presumption and security he returned home without being justified. God saw, under the vail of his outward sanctity, a polluted heart and a rotten liver. And while that was the case, he would not accept of his smooth skin and bushy fleece—of his fair speeches or pretended righteousness. May these considerations be deeply impressed on all our hearts, that we may no more trust in our moral deeds or religious duties, or in any thing that is short of Jesus Christ—short of a living union with him by faith—short of having Christ in us as the hope and forerunner of glory!—

But alas! though we are gone astray like lost sheep, and must perish for ever, if the good shepherd doth not come after us into the wilderness, and bring us back on his own shoulders; Yet few of us see our need of his aid, or can be persuaded to yield ourselves as willing captives to his grace. Notwithstanding all our guilt and helplessness, we will not be wholly indebted to
 Jesus

Jesus Christ for salvation. We rest short of him, and substitute something else in his room. Not only the careless and ignorant, but such as are under some concern about the welfare of their souls, have many false props on which they lean and build their hopes of heaven. These I come now to enumerate and to shew their insufficiency.

And first, some reject the Saviour and refuse to accept of his proffered help, from a supposition, that the knowledge of God, as their Creator, is enough to secure their eternal happiness. This is the pretence of Deists and modern Philosophers, for neglecting the great salvation which the Lord Jesus purchased with his blood. "Do you think," say they, "that my Maker will damn me?" Yes, I do indeed, if you have nothing better to rely upon than that God hath made you. For, if the bare act of creation had been sufficient to avert his wrath from such as had offended him, no devil would ever have been condemned or had felt his vengeance; because they were originally the creatures of his power and the workmanship of his hands. But I have a more sure word of prophecy to confirm my point, and to illustrate my assertion. "He, who made them," saith Isaiah, "will have no mercy on them: and he, who formed them, will shew them no favour." *Isa. xxvii. 11.* Oh! miserable would be the present lot of believers and very dismal would their prospect be, if they had no other security for their final happiness, but that God hath made them and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life.

Others, secondly, lay great stress upon the bounties of providence, and the many outward blessings which they receive from God. Many

of the great and opulent rest here, being either too proud to place their whole dependence on a crucified Saviour, or too full to relish the self-denying doctrines of the cross. "What!" say they, "can you suppose that he, who hath blest me in all my ways, and prospered me in all my worldly undertakings, will at last sentence me to that horrible pit where there is not so much as a drop of water to cool the parched tongue? will all his present kindnesses to me terminate in eternal hatred? No, I will never believe it. The Almighty hath always stood my friend. My earthly stores abound, and my cup of prosperity runs over. He gives me health. He gives me plenty. Many temporal deliverances hath he often wrought for me. From the gate of death, he hath sometimes brought me back, restoring me to my friends and possessions; when I had almost taken my last farewell of them. And will he, after all, cast my soul to hell?" Indeed, as far as I know, he may. If any have no better evidence of God's love to their souls than that riches increase and their situation in this world is easy, there is a passage in scripture that strongly militates against them, and proves quite a contrary doctrine to what they maintain. Let such hear the word of the Lord and tremble for themselves. "So they did eat and were filled; for, he gave them their own desire, and they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel." *Psal. lxxviii. 29, 30, 31.* Mark two circumstances in this narrative and learn never to estimate

estimate God's love to your souls by his liberality to your bodies. "While their meat," it is said, "was yet in their mouths, he slew the fattest of them." Alas! alas! rich pastures are often a bad sign. The cattle, which are first to be killed, have always the best fodder. Why? That they may be the soonest fattened and made ready for the knife. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." If you have no other foundation for your eternal felicity, but that you enjoy good things in this life, you lean upon a broken reed, which is sure to fail you, when you come to stand most in need of support. Riches avail not in the day of wrath, and can be of no service to you when your souls are quitting their earthly tabernacles and soaring aloft to the world of spirits.

Others, thirdly, depend much upon what they have done for the Lord in supporting his interest, and carrying on his cause in the world. Here those superficial professors rest, who have a little gospel-light in their understanding, and a great deal of animal heat in their hearts. Such can cry out with Jehu, "Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord," while the golden calves are still at Bethel, and steal their affections from the God of Israel. They may contend earnestly for the faith, and yet never be possessed of saving faith. They may fight the Lord's battles against the Canaanites, and yet never come to Canaan. They may be nursing fathers and nursing mothers to the church, while their own souls are perishing with hunger. So the earth yields sustenance to the saints, and yet it is but earth still; it is not heaven. Nay, I may go
step

step farther and say upon scripture authority—
 “ That many shall on the great day claim it as
 “ their privilege that they have prophesied, cast
 “ out devils, and done many wonderful works
 “ in the name of the Lord, whom he shall yet
 “ disown, as workers of iniquity.” *Matt. vii. 22.*
 Here was much confidence in their relation to
 God, “ we have prophesied in thy name.” Here
 were great bustle and activity in his service, “ We
 “ have done many wonderful works.” Here
 was remarkable success, “ We have cast out
 “ devils.” Here was the semblance of uncom-
 mon humility, “ We arrogate no honour to our-
 “ selves, as all that we have done was in thy
 “ name and for thy glory.” But what follows?
 “ Depart from me: for, I know you not.” My
 dear friends! here is a scripture that ought to
 fill your hearts with awe, and to set you upon
 narrowly examining into the ground of your
 hopes. A trying time may soon come. And
 oh! if you should, under a splendid profession,
 be found not rooted and established upon the
 rock of ages, miserable will be your doom. Your
 zeal and fervour will stand you in no stead, un-
 less it will be to increase your torments and to
 render your hell the hotter. O then for your
 souls sake beware of resting upon any thing for
 salvation; but upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ.
 Be diligent in your duty. Be zealous for his
 cause. Be liberal to his poor and indigent mem-
 bers: but oh! after all, depend wholly upon
 him for righteousness and acceptance, both
 now and for ever. God hath ordained, in or-
 der to stain our pride and keep us humble,
 that nothing shall sustain the fallen soul of man
 but the shoulders of his own dear son.

Others

Others, fourthly, trust in the promises, not as they were made to the federal head of his people, and ratified by his blood, but as absolute promises on which they may lay hold without any reference to him. And being thus without Christ they can suck no consolation from the promises. Though they carry them often to the throne of grace, and spread them as the ground of their faith; yet they bring back but little grace from thence. Why? Because they lay more stress upon the promises than upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews were mighty sticklers for the promises concerning the coming of the Messiah: but when the Messiah came himself they would not receive him. So many still honour the promises and reject the Saviour. But what saith the Spirit? "All the promises of God are in him, yea, and in him Amen." 2 Cor. i. 20. The Lord Jesus is the substance of them all, and they can do us no good but as they are communicated to us through him, and sealed to our souls by the testimony of his Spirit.

Nay, lastly, we have no warrant to cleave even to the God of the promises, but as he is accessible to us in Christ Jesus, through whom alone he hath promised to accept us. "God," out of Christ, "is a consuming fire" to our sinful souls: and woe be to those who approach him without this Benjamin. He hath appointed his Son for salvation to the ends of the earth. And were any to draw near him with as much confidence as it is possible for Christless souls to assume, the Father would repel them from his presence, and send them back to search for the Lord Jesus till they had found him, that under the shadow of his wings they might find admittance to the mercy-

feat. The Saviour himself intimated so much
 when he said, that "no man could come to the
 Father but by him." *John* xiv. 6. But why
 should I speak so mildly upon this subject.
 The truth is, that if any of us were to go to an
 absolute God without a Mediator, or without
 having first made "the angel of his presence"
 our friend; divine justice would instantly find
 us out, and cry aloud "there is a rebel in the
 palace: take him, and bind him, that he may
 be cast into outer darkness." Thus it was
 with those presumptuous persons in *Micah*,
 who would lean upon the Lord in their own
 strength," and would rush before him in a
 way that he had not appointed: "they were
 plowed as a field and became as heaps." *Micah*
iii. 12. And oh! if the great Creator
 cannot, consistently with the honour of his at-
 tributes or *will not* agreeably to the declarations
 of his word, uphold us without Christ: how can
 we presume to lean upon any creature, or expect
 salvation from any thing that we are or have!
 Surely the tree of life is utterly inaccessible to us
 but through Jesus Christ. The cherubim and
 the flaming sword still guard every other quarter,
 and are an impregnable barrier to stop up every
 other avenue. "There is no other way but
 Christ to present peace and futurebliss." O!
 that we may all have grace to look unto him
 and be saved! All the ends of the earth are
 called to turn their eyes to him, be their case
 ever so desperate and their guilt ever so heinous.
 And I am sure that there is no help for any
 sinful soul of man but in him, "neither is
 there salvation in any other." *Acts* iv. 12. Of
 every other dependance, on which sinners may
 rely,

rely, I may safely say, "that it is like the hy-
 pocrites hope, which shall be cut off when it
 is brought to the test, and feeble as the spider's
 web when they come to lean upon it. They
 may put their trust in it, but it shall not stand.
 They may hold it fast, but it shall not endure."
Job viii. 14, 15. And oh! what a poor depen-
 dence is *that*, which fails and gives way in the
 hour of trial! It would be much better to be
 without such dependance than with it. And
 yet mankind are ever prone to set up such
 false props. As it is said of Absalom, when he
 had buried his children, or "was without a son,
 that he reared for himself a pillar to keep
 his name in remembrance." 2 Sam. xviii. 18.
 So do those, who are without Christ, make
 much of their own good deeds to support their
 sinking spirits, and often try to erect a Babel, by
 which they may climb to heaven in their own
 strength, and by their own righteousness. But
 as one living child is a better memorial than a
 thousand dead pillars, so one precious Christ is
 a much surer foundation for the convinced soul
 to rest upon than the best services of men or
 angels. "None but Jesus, none but Jesus can
 do helpless sinners good." Having therefore
 mentioned the many false props on which we are
 all too apt to lean, and exposed their utter in-
 sufficiency to bear the weight which we are in-
 clined to lay upon them, I will now attempt
 through the assistance of the eternal Spirit, to
 point out those true and blessed *shoulders*, which
 alone can fetch us back from the briars and
 thorns of this wilderness, and carry us in safety
 to the paradise of God. There are two things
 which are necessary to be cleared up, before

we can be persuaded to put confidence in any one, or to look for any great benefit from him. We must not only have his promises to be the ground of our expectation, but we must be convinced of his sincerity and ability to perform them. It were in vain to expect any great matter from a poor man, who is in debt and hath not a farthing to help himself. He may promise to assist us; but he has not the power to do it. He is a bankrupt himself, and his promise is good for nothing. He may be well-affected towards, and willing to relieve us, if he could; but the means are wanting, and he can only put us off with good wishes, notwithstanding all his promises. So, on the other hand, we may apply in our distress to a rich man, who can instantly supply our wants, if he will: but we have no promise to plead as the ground of our suit. It depends wholly on his good pleasure whether he will extend his kindness to us or not. But when a person hath promised to be our friend who hath the will as well as the power to relieve us, and whose honesty and punctuality are unimpeachable, we deem the gift that he hath engaged to bestow upon us as much our own, as if it were already in our possession. Now, such is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the word and the arm of Jehovah; the promise and the power of performing it. No shoulders but his can bring back the wandering soul from the entanglements of this sinful world, and restore it to everlasting happiness. And he both can and will do it. Why? 1. Because he is the promise of the Father. "God hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, that he might perform mercy promised to our fathers, and ϵ in

"his holy covenant." *Luke* i. 69, 70. And in another place God saith of him by the mouth of his prophet, "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, and for a light of the Gentiles." *Isa.* xlii. 6. Here we see that the Lord Christ is our promised help. God hath laid our salvation upon his shoulders. And he hath strength to accomplish what he hath undertaken; because, 2. He is the arm of the Father, and hath full authority to execute his sovereign will. The glory of the Lord rests upon him, and in him all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. "All power in heaven and in earth is delivered into his hands." And he is warranted by his divine commission to be the great peace-maker between an offended God and his rebellious creatures. Hence the Father commands such, as are at variance with him and desirous of reconciliation, to make their application for it through him alone, who is able to bring it about. "Let them," saith he, "take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me." *Isa.* xxvii. 5. As if he had said, "stand back, sinners, and do not lean upon me without a Mediator: but take hold of my strength, that he may reconcile you first unto me. He hath power to heal the breach that is made between us. He can bring you near unto me, who are now afar off. I neither will nor can have any dealings with you till your peace is made in and by him. In him only can we meet with each other as friends. Till then my justice forbids your approach, however my mercy may be inclined to invite it. Apply therefore first to him without any advocate but a sense of
 " your

“ your misery : and when he hath taken your
 “ guilt upon himself, and spoken peace to your
 “ souls ; I will accept you in him, and for his
 “ sake be well pleased with you.”

Behold, my brethren, what a noble foundation is laid for our faith and hope in the mediation of Jesus Christ. He undertook our salvation in the eternal counsels of peace. He was the Lamb intentionally slain for his people before the world was made. It was in virtue of his covenant-engagements that all they, who went to heaven before his incarnation, were saved. And when the fulness of time was come, in which he was to assume our nature that he might fulfill all righteousness in our stead, and make atonement for our sins by the sacrifice of himself, he left his ninety-nine glorified spirits in heaven, that he might descend into this world to seek and to save such as were lost. And oh ! how busy and indefatigable was he in pursuit of the poor wanderers, during the days of his flesh ! He searched every corner of Judea that he might find out his own, and gather them into his sacred fold. He went to the wilderness, that he might fetch back his strayed sheep ; to the house that he might recover the piece of silver that was dropped ; to a far country, that he might reclaim the prodigal son ; to Joseph’s well, that he might convert the woman of Samaria ; to Bethany, that he might cast out seven devils from Mary Magdalen ; to Capernaum, that he might give faith to the centurion, and restore health to his servant ; to Jericho, that he might call Zaccheus and bring salvation to his house and heart. In a word, “ he
 “ consecrated the house,” as one saith, “ by his
 “ conception ; the stable by his birth ; the fields

" by the glad tidings of his incarnation; the
 " river by his baptism; the sea-coasts by his
 " doctrine; the vallies by his cures; the garden
 " by his prayer; the temple by his sacrifice,
 " and the mountain by his sufferings." — He spent
 his whole life upon earth in going about to seek
 and to find the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
 And when he had by his obedience unto death
 satisfied divine justice, and finished all the work
 that was given him to do, he ascended to his
 mediatorial throne, that he might there plead the
 merit of his blood in our behalf, and manage
 our concerns. "Yes, blessed for ever be his dear
 name! as he died for our sins and rose again for
 our justification, so he ever liveth to make in-
 tercession for us. He not only loved us and
 gave himself for us in the days of his flesh, but
 he is still mindful of us, while he is sitting on the
 right hand of the majesty on high, and sends his
 Spirit to convince us of sin, and to apply his
 blood bought salvation to our hearts; to bring us
 back when we wander from him, and to " carry
 " us to our eternal home on his own shoulders
 " rejoicing." He is not a cold or luke-warm
 seeker: but wherever he hath fixed his affections,
 he will in the course of his providence, and by
 the ministry of his word, search for that soul, un-
 til he find it. And oh! when he hath found
 those who were lost, he rejoices over them to do
 them good. " He feeds his flock like a shep-
 " herd. He gathers the lambs with his arms;
 " and carries them in his bosom: and gently
 " leads those which are with young." *Isa. xl. 11.*
 Oh! he is the strong deliverer and the mighty
 God. The Lion of the tribe of Judah is his
 name. And shall he rescue no prey from the
 hands

hands of the enemy here this day? Shall he have no cause of rejoicing for the recovery of some lost sheep in this assembly? Here are strong shoulders which can carry us all to heaven. O that many of us may be layed on them this day! O that this great and good shephend would come and claim us for his own; would set his mark upon us, and carry us home on his own shoulders rejoicing! Here are shoulders which will remain in full strength, till they have conveyed us to a city of habitation. Cheer up then, my friends, and give your fears to the wind. Though you are lost and wandering sheep, yet here is a good shepherd, who laid down his life for you, that he might save you from perishing. But you will say; "numerous are our enemies: Pharoah and all his hosts are combined against us." Be it so: yet greater is he who is for you, than all they who are against you. This King of Zion must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet. "But hell affrights us with its livid flames, and we cannot overcome its terrors." Through Jesus Christ you may be victorious over this fear. He hath the keys of death and hell at his girdle; and while you are under his protection, not a hair of your head shall be singed. Oh! strong, very strong is your support. Underneath you are the shoulders of the incarnate Saviour. Oh! lean upon them and "stand still, that you may see the salvation of God." Remember that it is upon *his own* shoulders he lays you. And indeed no other shoulders would serve your turn. No strayed sheep—no fallen child of Adam can come up from this wilderness, unless he be found "leaning upon this beloved." This is the way,

in which all the godly in every age ascended to glory. They were carried thither on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. When Eve had received the promise of the woman's seed, she called her son *Seth* or the foundation, as if she had foreseen that the seed of the woman would come, when she was enabled to *stay* herself upon him. David, who was his father according to the flesh, called the Messiah "his stay." *Psal. xviii. 18.* And Mary, when she had conceived him, rejoiced in the babe that was in her womb as "the God of her salvation." *Luke i. 47.* Oh! he is the anointed Saviour sent and qualified to bear the sins of many; "born his people to deliver; born a child, and yet a King; born to reign in us for ever, and us to his kingdom bring." There is no other name by which any lost sinner can be saved; no other foundation upon which any of our guilty race can build their hopes of heaven. He alone is the good shepherd, who goeth into the wilderness after his strayed sheep, and layeth them on his own shoulders rejoicing. But here some will be ready to ask, "who are they among our fallen race whom the Lord Jesus lays upon his own shoulders? all are gone astray, and there are but few, who are brought back to the sacred fold. Who are those few?" They are not the *worldlings*, who are too much engaged in the concerns of the body, and are too intent upon the gratification of their lusts to have any leisure for bestowing the least thought upon the care of the soul. They are not the *pharisees*, who feed without fear on the husks of their own meagre duties, and expect to merit heaven by their own worthless deeds. All these are too strong and self-sufficient;

cient; too confident and heart-whole to throw
 themselves upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ.
 These are rich, increased with goods, and have
 need of nothing. They do not feel themselves
 to be lost, and therefore see not their need of
 salvation. Hoping to be saved in their sins, or
 by virtue of a little outward formality and par-
 tial reformation, they reject the counsel of God
 against themselves, count the blood of the cove-
 nant an unnecessary thing, and do despite to the
 Spirit of grace. But oh! if sinners could have
 been saved by their own doings, and in their
 own strength, God would not have laid their
 help upon another. No: He, who is so tender
 of our blood, would not have been so lavish
 as to suffer his only-begotten Son to bleed
 to death for us, if our recovery had been attain-
 able in any other way. Some other method;
 that is less expensive, would have been devised.
 And in all likelihood *Moses*, or the deeds, the
 services and the righteousnesses of the law would
 have been deemed equal to the task of carrying
 us from Egypt to Canaan. But what saith the
 scripture to this point? Why, it tells us, that
 "what the law could not do, in that it was weak-
 " through the flesh, God sent his own Son in the
 " likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned
 " sin in *his* flesh." *Rom. viii. 3.* So that from
 this quarter there is not the least ray of hope
 for any soul of man that hath done evil. The
 language, the unchangeable language of the law
 is, "do this, and live: but the soul that sinneth,
 " shall surely die." If salvation could have been
 obtained by the covenant of works, the covenant
 of grace would have been needless and superflu-
 ous. The question then still recurs "who are they,
 " whom

" whom the Lord Jesus lays on his own should-
 " ers?" I must now answer this question by asking
 another. Who among you are weak, and feel
 their need of some better support than they find in
 themselves? who are lame, and would be glad
 to lean upon a crutch? who are weary, and
 would be happy to enter into some place of rest?
 who, after having run the whole round of created
 good and found its insufficiency to satisfy the
 boundless desires of their souls, can adopt the
 experience of Solomon and say, " I have seen
 " all the works, which are done under the sun;
 " and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spi-
 " rit; *vanity* in respect to their inability to sup-
 " ply the wants of my soul, and *vexation* as they
 " tend only to draw my spirit from its right
 " center, and to bewilder me in a maze of er-
 " ror and uncertainty?" *Eccles. i. 14.* Now, if
 there be any of you whom this description suits,
 you are the persons, whom the Lord Jesus is
 ready and willing to lay on his own shoulders.
 None but such, as have been convinced of sin
 and enfeebled under a sense of their manifold
 corruptions, can be persuaded to rely upon him
 alone. He is always the last resource of the
 miserable. They will try all other means, be-
 fore they will apply to him. See this truth
 clearly illustrated in the history of the woman,
 who was afflicted " with an issue of blood." As
 long as she had money in her purse, and a phy-
 sician to consult, she never thought of going to
 Jesus Christ. Though she must have heard of
 the many cures which he daily performed among
 the diseased, yet she would give no credit to the
 report. She had something else still left, on
 which she could lean with greater confidence.

But when all her substance was spent, and she could not be healed by any other means; she came to the Saviour, that she might touch the hem of his garment; and so far was he from upbraiding her for making him her last refuge, that he not only caused her issue of blood to staunch, but commended her faith, bid her be of good comfort, and go in peace. Such are they, whom the Lord Jesus lays on his own shoulders. They have none else, either in heaven or under heaven, who can save them.

And the way or order, in which the holy Spirit applies that salvation to the souls of lost sinners, which the Son of God purchased with his blood, is by weakening them when they are strong, and by strengthening them when they are weak. As they, who can support themselves will not want or look for other help, and none will care to be carried but such as are too feeble to walk; so the *first* work of the Spirit upon the fallen heart of man is to divest him of his own strength, that he may be invested with the strength of his God. As David said upon another occasion, "He weakened my strength in the way." *Psal.* cii. 23. So must you say from your own experience, my friends, before you can enter into the rest of the people of God. You must fall out with your own wealth, before you will consent to accept of the riches of grace. You must be pulled down, before you are built up. And indeed one is as difficult as the other. Do you rely upon your own strength? If Jesus loves you, his Spirit will never suffer you to be at ease, till you are stripped of that vain confidence, and are brought to feel your own weakness. "The weapons of our warfare," saith Paul, "are
"not

“not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, and the overthrowing of all lofty imaginations which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.”

2 Cor. x. 4, 5. They are the “weak things of this world which God hath chosen to himself;” weak preaching to cast down strong corruptions, and faint praying to resist powerful temptations. If any of you are erecting a Babel by your own works, or are fortifying your castle by your own righteousness, know that it is all but lost labour, and that there shall not be left one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down. Whether you are potent in your corruptions, or buoyed up by a notion of your own righteousness; the Lord will certainly at one time or other weaken your strength in the way, as he never lays any upon his own shoulders, but such as are humble and infirm. Yes, I proclaim to you in the face of heaven and earth, O ye self-sufficient and self-righteous generation, that if no other charge could be brought against you, but that out of Christ you are pure in your own eyes, and have never been wounded in your spirits on the score of your sins, the weight of that one charge is enough to sink you into the belly of hell. God hath determined in all his dealings with sinners to stain their pride and to pour contempt on all their glory, that no flesh may boast of its might before him. And woe, woe, woe be to those who are strong in their religious duties, while they are not strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; strong in their hearing, praying or almsgiving, and strong in nothing else. The strength of such, like Sampson’s, is in their hair: but oh! where will their strength

be,

be, when the Lord cuts off their proud locks? These are they, who encompass themselves with sparks of their own kindling, and warm their hearts at the fire of nature, saying, ha! ha! But none of these, while they continue in this frame of mind, shall ever enjoy the blessed privilege of being layed on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. No: they must become weary before they will have so much as a desire to be carried; weary of themselves, weary of sin; weary of Satan and all his delusive baits. The Lord make many of you thus weary this day! When Zion knows herself, her voice is heard as of a woman in travail. She bewaileth herself, and "spreadeth her hands, saying, woe is me now, for my soul is wearied because of murderers." *Jer. iv. 31.* She had long consoled with these murderers: but now she is quite tired of their company. Worldly gain and carnal pleasure had formerly been her chief delight: but now she loaths and abhors them all, as knowing that they lead to the chambers of death. And oh! if poor sinners did see themselves to be, as they really are, in the company of thieves, who are combined to rob them of their happiness, and to murder their souls, they would not be so easy in their horrid situation as they generally are. No: they would be as eager to get rid of their companions, as they would be to escape from the paws of a hungry lion in the deserts of Arabia. They would cry out mightily for help: and if they saw David coming to rescue them from their danger, their hearts would leap within them at the sight, and they would rejoice to be laid on the shoulders of their kind deliverer. But alas! their eyes are so blind that they cannot perceive the destruction and misery

misery which are in their ways. They are pleased with their companions, and do not want to be separated from them. Hence the Saviour is despised, and his salvation is neglected. Oh! that the Spirit of God would now open every blind eye in this congregation; and erase every false foundation, that seeing your danger and feeling your wretchedness, you may with your whole hearts intreat the Lord Jesus to come and deliver you from the tyranny of Satan and the dominion of your sins! It is easy to know when persons are fatigued with travelling by their turning into the first lodging that they meet with. So may you shew that you are self-empried, and brought off from all creature dependence by your readiness to be layed on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. When the holy Spirit hath weakened the strong, his *next* step is to strengthen the weak. When Paul was "weak, then was he strong." At such times his Lord whispered to him that, under all his trials and infirmities, "his grace would be sufficient for him." 2 Cor. xii. 9. And it is the general characteristic of all true believers that "out of weakness they were made strong." Heb. xi. 34. Have any of you then been humbled before the Lord? Do you now begin to see how dark and blind your minds are respecting spiritual things? then go to the throne of grace under a deep sense of the darkness of your understandings, and the deafness of your hearts, saying, "we are but as yesterday, and know nothing. So foolish are we and ignorant that we are as a beast before thee." If you go to Jesus Christ knowing, you will return ignorant; but if you go him blind, you will come back seeing. If you

knowing nothing you appear before him, he will make you altogether wise unto salvation. 18. Let "no man deceive himself: if any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." 1 Cor. iii.

18. Are you weak, and do you desire to be strengthened? would you have the power of divine grace to flow into your souls, and to be operative on your wills and affections? Then go to the Saviour under a full conviction that, in you dwelleth no good thing, that you are not "sufficient of yourselves to think one good thought," and that you have no power in yourselves so much as to will or to do any thing that is good. You must not only know but feel that there "is a law in your members warring against the law of your minds, and bringing you into captivity to the law of sin," that from a felt experience of your inward conflict you may be forced to cry out with Paul in the like circumstances, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." And oh! when you are thus laid low, the Lord Jesus will come to lift you up on his own shoulders, and cause you to triumph with the same apostle in his salvation, saying, "we thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Rom. vii. 24, 25. I cannot conclude this branch of the subject without dropping here a word of comfort to the weaklings of Christ's flock. As I think that I have a message this day that is peculiarly adapted to strengthen the weak, so I pray God to enforce it with his peculiar authority. The Lord Jesus is come into this wilderness to seek his lost sheep. As you are such he pities you, and is now willing to lay you on his own

shoulders rejoicing. You are the constant objects of his pastoral care. His command to his under-shepherds hath a particular reference to your case, when he saith, "strengthen ye the weak and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them who are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: for, in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." *Isa. xxxv.* 3, 4, 5, 6. How great soever your infirmities may be, I should think that the Lord hath here made effectual provision to answer them all. "The blind see. The deaf hear. The lame walk. The dumb speak." And whosoever shall be found in the way of holiness shall no more err or run astray. Be not therefore cast down or dismayed. Weak as you are in yourselves, you have omnipotence for your defence. All the promises, which you have now heard, belong to those who are entangled in the wilderness or strayed into solitary places, as you may learn from the beginning of the chapter. Whatever be your distress, the good shepherd can deliver you from it. Nothing shall ever separate you from his love. Soon shall it be your happy lot "as the ransomed of the Lord, to return from this wilderness to Sion, with songs and everlasting joy upon your heads, where you shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever."

I hasten now to conclude the whole with a few inferences from what has been said. And

ist is our state by nature and practice so wretched
 and deplorable, that none but the Lord Jesus
 Christ can save us? are we so far strayed into
 the wilderness that nothing but his shoulders can
 bring us back? Then how great are our obliga-
 tions to him for his kind interposition in our be-
 half, and with what thankfulness should we em-
 brace his free salvation. He came himself to
 deliver us out of the hands of our enemies. His
 mercy finds us out, while we are lying in our
 blood. His mercy pities us, spares us, and for-
 gives us. His grace preserves us, and his power
 protects us. There is no good in any of our
 fallen race but what flows from him. If any of
 us be found; it is He, who came after us, took
 us up in his arms, and layed us on his should-
 ers. If any of us are enabled to persevere in
 the path of duty, it is He who gives us the grace
 of perseverance. Were we left to ourselves, we
 should still fall into sin and run into many kinds
 of danger. For, if Adam in a state of innocency
 could not resist a powerful temptation; how
 could we, his corrupt descendants, withstand the
 allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil,
 unless we were every moment kept by the mighty
 power of God. And herein lies the difference
 between Adam and us; he had not the grace
 of perseverance; but we have. Our good shep-
 herd, when he finds us, lays us on his own should-
 ers. O let this consideration encourage every
 poor sinner to repent and come to Jesus Christ.
 Indeed, my friends, he is so tender-hearted and
 full of compassion, that "a bruised reed he
 " will not break, and smoking flax he will not
 " quench." O be as yielding clay in his hands.
 Be willing to be found by him. He is sure to
 keep

keep what you commit to him unto the great day. May his Spirit now enable every sin-convinced and helpless soul among you to make his shoulders your only stay! I pray God that there may be none of you to whom he shall thus speak on another day, "Because I have called, and you have refused: because I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but you have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof. I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh." *Prov. i. 24, 25, 26.* *Shoulders* imply strength: and in this parable they represent the all-sufficiency of grace and merit that there is in Christ Jesus to justify the guilty and uphold the weak. He is "the mighty God, and the strong Redeemer;" strong to satisfy divine justice; strong to open the gates of heaven which sin had barred up; strong to apply that salvation to the soul, which he had bought with his blood; strong to rescue the prey out of the hands of the enemy, to defend it, when rescued, from every evil, and to bring it through the agonies of death into eternal life. Such are the shoulders of Jesus Christ. And oh! how needful are they not only for the perishing sinner, but likewise for the feeble believer. We cannot do without them. We stand in momentary need of them. And what enhances their value above all is, that they never fail us when we can lean upon them. Trust them, poor soul. They will bear all the weight that thou canst lay upon them. In Jesus Christ thou mayest be strong, however weak thou art in thyself. In him thou mayest stand; under him thou mayest fight, and through him thou art sure to conquer. Yes, "through him
 — strengthening

“strengthening thee thou canst do all things.” *Phil.* iv. 13. But here thou mayest be apt to say, “alas! my corruptions are strong and I cannot withstand them.” Be it so: yet the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, and the efficacy of his grace can destroy the power of the most prevailing lusts. Throw thyself upon his shoulders, and he will carry thee aloft; far above the dregs of sensuality, and the mire of this bewitching earth. But thou still sayest, “Oh! I am afraid of death, and cannot get the mastery over it. I have been all my life subject to this bondage; and when I bring the thoughts of my dissolution near me, I am as full of fears as ever.” Then thou hast forgotten that the Lord Jesus hath overcome death, and despoiled it of all its terrors. Hath he not said, “O death, I will be thy death.” Why then shouldest thou be faint or disheartened at any event that lies before thee? is not the Lord Jesus a present help in every season of need? hath he not promised that “his grace shall be sufficient for thee, and that his strength shall be perfected in thy weakness?” *2 Cor.* xii. 9. And thinkest thou that he will deny thee dying grace for dying moments, when thy whole dependance is upon him? No: he will come to thee over all thy doubts and fears, and enable thee, while the cold sweat is upon thee, and thy heart-strings are giving way, boldly to sing, “O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! I thank God for Jesus Christ my Lord, in whom I can triumph over every foe.” Let not therefore your hands hang down, or your courage fail under any trial. It is not Aaron and Hur, as in the case of Moses, who hold you up;

but it is the Lord from heaven. And he can hold you up at all times and in all circumstances; in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. Nay, the more stress you lay upon him, the firmer will be your footing. He loves to be trusted. O make him your only stay in every ordinance and in every duty. When you feel a weakness in your hearing; in your reading; in your praying; or in any thing that you do either for God or man: O lean at that time upon your beloved, just as a tender babe leans upon his mother's breasts, and say, "O dear Father, carry me in thy bosom, or lay me on thy shoulders. I cannot walk. My heart is faint, and my knees do tremble. Oh! I shall fall down. God of heaven, have mercy upon me, and suffer not my feet to slide into sin. Hold thou me up, that I may run in the path of thy commandments." Oh! were this your cry no evil could approach to hurt you. No tender-hearted mother was ever more ready to take her fainting child into her bosom than the Saviour would be to lay you on his own shoulders. O venture on him, that you may from your own experience know the security of those whom he sustains, and be able to join his people in glorying his name for his saving mercy and protecting grace. The call to believers is to praise him for what they enjoy, and to trust him for what is to come. Is Jesus precious to your souls? hath he kept you from fainting when you have been much alarmed with inward conflicts and outward distress? hath he succoured you when you were tempted, and made way for your escape? doth he still support you when you are assaulted and preserve you from falling? Then with thankfulness

fulness proclaim your great Deliverer's praise. Say to the glory of his grace, "The Lord is our shepherd, who shields us from every danger and delivers us from every evil. His shoulders are the place of our security. And we stand as much in need of them as ever. Were he to leave us to ourselves, we should soon be overcome by our remaining corruptions. As Eve, when she saw the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and Achan when he had fastened his eyes on the wedge of gold, had no power to resist the temptation or to refrain their hands from the forbidden object: so should we be caught by every bait and ensnared through our own folly, unless the keeper of Israel maintained a strict watch over us, and we were every moment preserved as in a garrison, not by our own prudence and strength but by his mighty power. O what shall we render unto the Lord for all the benefits which he hath bestowed upon us!" Why, join issue with the Psalmist and say, "we will receive the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." *Psal. cxvi.* 13, 14.

But secondly, Were they all lost and gone astray into the wilderness, who are brought back on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus Christ? Then we need not despair of the recovery of any poor sinner, while he is on this side of hell. David rescued the prey from the paw of the lion and out of the tusks of the bear. And a greater than David, even the Saviour of the lost and perishing, hath often snatched his chosen ones, not only from the mouth, but as it were from the paunch of the devil, as he plucked
Jenah

Jonah from the belly of the whale. Have you therefore, my brethren, a child, a brother, a relative, or a friend, who is seeking death in the error of his ways? O give him not over as quite lost. While there is life, there may be hope. Far as he may have wandered into the devious paths of sin, and fast as he may be hampered in the snares of the devil, the good shepherd can loose him and bring him back on his own shoulders rejoicing. O spread his case before the mercy-seat, and beg hard for his speedy and effectual conversion. And who knows but that God will hear you and grant you the life, the eternal life of your brother or friend. God hath said, "I will seek that, which was lost: I will bring again that which was driven away: and I will bind up that which was broken." *Ezek. xxxiv. 16.* O plead this promise before your heavenly Father. Perhaps he may say unto you, "Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt."

Again thirdly, If believers come out of the wilderness leaning upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ: then their salvation is certain, and nothing can disannul or endanger it. The "exceeding greatness of his power" ensures their safety. O believer! know, and improve thy privileges. The name of Jesus is a name that is above every name, and the power of Jesus is a power that is above every power: so that be thy wants ever so great, and be thy trials ever so alarming; still thou mayest find in him a sure anchor for thy soul, and a never-failing supply of every needful comfort. As he saith, "look unto me and be saved:" so I say, "look unto him and be strengthened." How fares it with thee, my brother? doth thy heart tremble at the mention of

of principalities and powers? Name the name of Christ, and they will all shrink into nothing. He is above them all. Nothing ever could, and nothing ever shall terrify the faithful soul, while it loves Jesus, and can make his name a strong tower, into which it may enter and be safe.

In the last place of all, we may learn from what hath been said, that where our Lord layeth any poor sinners upon his shoulders, he works a change in their hearts, and brings them back from the wilderness into which they had strayed. They are men of another spirit from what they used to be. Being taken from off their own legs and layed upon his shoulders, they go on rejoicing in the path of duty. The first of these points is denied by the Arminians, and the last is discarded with scorn by the Antinomians. But I shall endeavour with divine help to verify them both. In the first act of the Spirit upon our fallen souls, he neither cuts off our legs nor makes use of them, but he takes us and lays us on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. The strayed sheep had legs, but they were such as could not support her, or else she would still have run away from the shepherd and roamed farther and farther into the wilderness. But she had now lost her strength, and was glad to be carried back into the fold, where she might have her bruises healed, and be supplied in green pastures with such fresh vigour from day to day as might qualify her to run about like the rest of the herd. Thus are we found by our good shepherd weak and wounded; entangled in the briars of this world and without either strength or inclination to return unto God. And were he only to restore us to the use of our limbs, we should make

no other use of them but to run away from him who had healed us as fast as we could. I need employ no other argument but my own woeful experience to make my own vile heart give credit to this truth. If the Lord had left me to myself, after he had called me by his grace and bound up my wounds, I should soon have perverted my renewed strength to stray again into the wilderness and to pursue the crooked paths of sin. But he, who found us, layed us on his own shoulders; united us to himself by an union that cannot be dissolved, and grants us the privilege to lean upon him as his bride till he hath brought us from this desert to our eternal home. And now being made one with the Saviour by faith, we gather fresh strength each day from that union, even as the woman derived virtue from the hem of his garment, and are enabled to walk before him in newness of life. We have no old or inherent strength, but are only strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and which is every moment communicated to us, to actuate us and keep us in the way of his commandments. So kind and condescending is this good Samaritan, that he gives us the new wine of his kingdom to revive and cheer our hearts when we are drooping, and pours upon us the rich oil of his grace to strengthen us for duty and to render every cross easy unto us. Thus he cuts down the Arminian and the Antinomian in our souls at one blow, and leaves us no room to harbour pride or to indulge sloth. To him be glory and dominion for ever. Amen.

S E R

S E R M O N II.

JOHN v. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

THOUGH the jewish historians have been very lavish in their praises of Jerusalem, and have taken great pains to celebrate its various curiosities; yet the pool of Bethesda seems to have escaped their notice, or to be mentioned in a very slight and cursory manner. And probably their reason for such silence or inattention to one of the chief glories of the place was this: as they must have looked upon this pool, where

so many cures were performed on the diseased, as an eminent prognostic of the Messiah's coming while it retained its virtues; so because it lost its efficacy when Jesus of Nazareth appeared in our world and thereby gave a plain intimation that it was He who was come and no other should be expected, they, stubborn in their prejudices and unwilling to yield to the force of truth, chose to stifle or disguise the account of it rather than record it, lest they should give a fresh proof of *that* which they were still resolved to deny. Josephus styles this pool the lake of Solomon. This king had many such pools as he tells us, *Eccles. ii. 6.* But this was likely to be the chief, as it lay at the back of the temple and was a kind of hospital for the sick and maimed. This *Bethesda* or house of mercy was situated at the back of the temple to signify and point out that the weak and needy believer hath no other support in the world but the back of his God. It was on his shoulders that the good shepherd carried home the lost sheep. The back or shoulders are the strongest parts of the body, and represent the security as well as the stability of the saints. Be they ever so feeble in themselves, there is in Christ Jesus an all-sufficiency of every grace treasured up for their immediate use; wisdom to direct them and strength to uphold them. "Behold! the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him." *Isa. xl. 10.* And oh! if he could perform such wonders with *his finger* that the magicians of Egypt were forced to cry out, "this is the finger of God:" what feats may he not perform with his arm; his all-powerful arm? Take courage then, O afflicted or dismayed soul. Thou

hast a noble foundation laid in Zion for thy hope. Thou hast no just cause to fear. Jesus Christ is thy Almighty Saviour. And he will not leave thee or forsake thee, till he hath fulfilled in thy believing heart all the purposes of his grace. He will carry thee on his own, and not on another's shoulders. The kings of the earth commit their burthens to their dependents, as Moses assigned a share of his government to some chosen men in Israel, *Exod. xviii. 25.* But the God of Israel will not entrust his charge to the keeping of others. No: He takes it all upon himself; and if means or instruments be needful to carry on his designs, he will lay both his people and the instrument of their deliverance upon his own back, that he may ensure their safety, while he reserves the whole glory of it to himself. Thus this pool was placed at the back of the temple to intimate that all its efficacy proceeded from that God who dwelled in the temple. It was a place of much resort; surrounded with cloysters or covered walks, in which a great multitude of impotent folk lay, waiting for the moving of the water. To this receptacle of "the blind, halt, and withered," the great Physician condescended to enter, while he went about doing good, that he might restore a poor cripple to the use of his limbs, who had been there languishing for near forty years. And oh! may I intreat your candid attention, my friends, while I enlarge a little upon the several circumstances of this miraculous cure, and conclude by inviting all the diseased in this assembly to come unto Jesus or at least to lift up their cry unto him, that he may work the like cure in each of their souls. O that now there may be a little troubling of the water in our hearts, that the angel of the covenant may

heal our wounds, and strengthen us to walk before him in newness of life?

We are told "that an angel went down at a certain season into the pool:" and lo! when he touched the water, he impregnated it with such virtues as would "heal all manner of sickness" and all manner of disease." This water is an expressive emblem of the blood of Jesus Christ, which not only heals all spiritual maladies upon earth, but preserves the ransomed and renewed soul for ever in a state of health in heaven. The rich man in the parable wanted but a drop of water: and indeed if he could have obtained but a drop of this water from heaven, it might have been not only sufficient to assuage his pains and mitigate his torments, but enough to quench the everlasting flames of hell.

It was "an angel," that went down to the pool. These are ministering spirits which serve the heirs of promise. And so good and gracious is the God of angels, that he commands them to "bear us in their hands," bear us in their hands and not on their shoulders, even as a nurse carries her sucking child in her arms. We cannot conceive what benefit we derive from their ministry: but this we know, that the scripture seldom mentions any great tribulation, in which the children of God are exercised and embarrassed upon earth, without taking notice at the same time that an angel was sent from heaven either to comfort or deliver them. Abraham and Jacob—Peter and Paul had frequent visits from angels when they were in distress, and received much consolation from their message. Nay, the Son of God himself is said to be "strengthened by them" when he was in an agony in the garden. Oh! the Lord

ever pities and sends relief to his people when they are persecuted, afflicted or oppressed. Their trials, like a loadstone, attract his regard, and bring down mercies from above. Hence the apostle said in the name of all suffering Christians—"We glory in tribulation." *Rom. v. 3.* For, as the flame burns briskest in the faggot that is most trodden down, so the power of the Lord operates most effectually in the hearts which are most humbled and kept down. When we are quite helpless and have no hope but in him, he stands forth to take our part and to work our deliverance, either by his own immediate act, or through the instrumentality of his holy angels.

While the impotent folk were waiting at the pool of Bethesda, an angel went down at a certain season, "and troubled the water." This troubling or commotion of the water was intended to give notice to the poor patients of his descent, that they might make haste to profit by it. It would have little availed them that the angel was come down into the pool, if they had no warning of his approach. Hidden treasures are of no use. They must be known and enjoyed, before we can be the better for them. "Those things, which are revealed, belong unto us." Hence God is pleased, in order to fix our attention on any of his mighty deeds to usher them in with some remarkable display of his mighty power. He gives us some signs either in the heavens above or in the earth beneath, by which he would prepare us to observe his footsteps or to improve his grace. Thus it was told David, that "when he heard the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, he should bestir himself: for then the Lord would go before him to smite the host of the Philistines." *2 Sam. v. 24.* So

there was a noise or a shaking among the dead bones, "before they came together bone to his bone." *Ezek. xxxvii. 7.* He first alarms us and then saves us. From all which we may learn that faith cometh by hearing—by attending to the voice of God in his word or in the course of his providence.

The ear is the door, at which the Lord usually knocks, when he comes in mercy either to awake his people out of their dead state or to heal their backslidings. And oh! how often doth he call upon them to "hear his word," and command them, as they regard his favour or would expect his help, to be attentive to his call and obedient to his voice. "He, who hath ears to hear, let him hear," was a frequent saying in our Saviour's mouth. Seeing therefore that there are so many exhortations in the Bible to "hear the word of the Lord:" how can any persons, who are stiled Christians, be remiss in this duty, or backward "in the assembling of themselves together?" Perhaps they may think that they have found out a way of going to heaven without hearing the gospel. But the apostle Paul knew nothing of such a way. He could not conceive "how any could believe in Him of whom they had not heard." *Röm. x. 14.* O then let none deceive themselves, as if any thing could excuse them from waiting upon the Lord in the great congregation. There he hath promised to be found by every seeking soul. O lose no opportunity of hearing the word of gospel-grace, while you have it. Perhaps you may soon experience a great dearth of it. It is not market-day on every day of the week. Nor is it a fair-day throughout the whole year. Perhaps the day of thy visitation, poor sinner, may be

be but short. The gospel may be withdrawn from thee, when thou art just beginning to have a little relish in hearing it. The shops may be shutting, when thou art just going to buy the oil of grace. Or, if the market should not be closed, and the candlesticks should not be removed, yet the flower of the fair may be over; and the truths, which thou dost hear to-day, thou mayest never any more hear in so plain and convincing a manner. Never any more may they come so home to thy heart with the powerful energy of the Holy Ghost. Besides, if thou shouldst be spared to the evening, and the means of grace should abide in equal efficacy to thy soul; yet the purchase of them may be much dearer *then* than it is now. They may cost thee thy liberty, and perhaps thy life. Though thou hast now the privilege to worship God according to thy conscience, yet thou mayest still live to see the old tragedy acted over again, and to hear the dread command "Christianos ad leones. Cast the Christians to the lions, or thrust them to the flames." Hear therefore, my brethren, hear for your lives, while your day of grace lasts. Be diligent hearers. Be attentive hearers. Be praying hearers. But after all, do not rest in the bare act of hearing. The alarm of the word is only intended to give you notice of the descent of the Saviour. It is his presence and power which must make you whole.

When the angel descended into the pool of Bethesda and troubled the water, there was but *one* diseased person healed at a time. And many may be here led to think, that the foundation is too large for so small a building, or that there is no need of so many circumstances to effect but

one cure. And indeed it may seem so at first view, as God can with equal ease restore millions to health as he can restore one: and it required the same exertion of his mighty power to heal one sick person, who is a little world in himself, as to heal many worlds. But you must know, my friends, that in those days it was a barren and unfruitful season. The mercy of God distilled as yet but in scanty showers to water and refresh this guilty earth. *Before* and *at* the coming of the Messiah, prophecy had entirely ceased, and there was but this one pool at Bethesda left to bear witness that God had not quite deserted his people. And here some small intimations were given of the approaching plenty, just as a few large drops of rain precede a thunder-storm. In years of scarcity our bread is doled out to us by short weight: but after a plentiful harvest, we are not so scrupulous about the turn of the scales. So before the Lord enriched our world with his bodily presence, his saving grace was but sparingly measured out to our fallen race: but when the year of jubilee came which crowned all the rest, his divine bounty began to flow abroad in copious streams, and "virtue went out of him which healed all" the maladies both of the body and the mind.

When the water was troubled, the first "who stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." No sickness could resist its efficacy. No patient returned from it uncured. But then they were to step into it, before the cure was wrought. Thus it is in the salvation of our souls. When the Lord shews us our misery, he works a readiness in our wills, which we had not before, to receive mercy. We hear of it with self-

self-application, and are enabled to embrace it with thankfulness. By faith we plunge into the red sea of redeeming blood with all our maladies about us, and *there* we leave them. Our loads drop off and our guilt is washed away! While we are yet in our sins, we are freely pardoned and "accepted in the beloved," God bestows his grace upon us, when we are quite unworthy of it, or else it would be no more grace: but when he hath been pleased to implant his grace in us, it is not to lie dormant there but to be an active principle within us; stirring us up to be "neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," and strengthening us to "run with patience the race that is set before us; to lay hold on eternal life, and to apprehend that for which we are also apprehended of Christ Jesus." They, who minister unto the Lord in heaven, are said to be "spirits and a flaming fire." *Psal. civ. 4.* And they, who serve him upon earth, are through grace made so lively and nimble in his service, that their feet hardly touch the ground. They are compared to a *cloud*, which, though it cannot move of itself, yet flies on rapid wings, when it is set in motion and impelled by the wind. So believers, notwithstanding the readiness of their gifts, have still need to have their mission renewed from day to day, and to cry with the prophet "here am I: send me." *Isa. vi. 8.* "The first, who stepped into the pool, was made whole." But you will say, "doth there not seem to be here some degree of partiality? how could they, who were lame, had spent their strength, and were pining with disease, be so alert to catch the golden opportunity as those

" those, whose diseases were not so debilitating
 " or of so long a standing? It is apparent that
 " the young and the slightly afflicted had greatly
 " the advantage over the old and decrepid, or
 " else this man had never lain at the pool for
 " near forty years. Now, how can this seeming
 " partiality be accounted for?" I cannot tell, un-
 less it be by exposing the faults of his neighbours,
 who would not assist him to go into the water.
 This is the manner of men, where grace doth
 not predominate. They are still like *brooks*,
 which are soon swelled and as soon sink. There
 are friends enough where providence smiles: but
 where it begins to lour, their numbers lessen
 apace. Many will turn to the dial, when the sun
 shines upon it: but all will pass by it, when it
 rains, or when the sky is covered with clouds.
 So when we are poor or sick; fallen among
 thieves, who have wounded and half killed us;
 there is none but the good Samaritan, who will
 succour and relieve us. It is He, who is the au-
 thor and giver of every blessing, that we enjoy
 or hope to inherit. Health and wealth, grace
 and glory are all communicated to us through
 his bountiful hands: and though he may some-
 times give and sometimes take away those mer-
 cies which we want; yet he may still say unto
 us under our sorest bereavements, as he said unto
 the labourers of old, " friend, I do thee no
 " wrong." *Matt. xx. 13.* Still all his dealings
 with us on this side of hell are abundant in good-
 ness and truth. For, it hath never yet been so
 bad with any of us, but what it might have been
 still worse. O let us never complain of our al-
 lotment, be it ever so distressing, while we either
 hope for, or have obtained the forgiveness of our
 sins;

sins: but let us, under all our distresses, go to Jesus Christ, and never be afraid that his love will fail us, or that the springs of his grace will be exhausted or dried up.

When our Lord went to the pool of Bethesda, "a certain man was there, who had an infirmity thirty and eight years." This was a long time to lie in that languishing condition, and to wait for a cure. A much shorter space would have put many others quite out of heart, and had sent them home to die. Even Elijah, one of the Lord's prophets, being in a melancholy frame of mind while he was flying from the rage of Jezebel, earnestly wished for death as he lay under the juniper-tree. And yet his trials had not lasted long. Job, the upright man, was so grievously depressed by his afflictions, that his wife advised him to curse God and die, counting a short death better than a lingering illness: and yet Job was not afflicted thirty and eight years. But the poor man in my text laboured under his infirmities for that length of time. And well might he have sunk in despondency, when his calamity was as long as it was great and as great as it was long. "But was not his punishment too severe, or protracted to too great a length?" I answer: it was not because God hated him or intended his hurt, that he was suffered thus to languish so long; but because, long illness, when it is sanctified to the soul, is an excellent medicine not only to purge out corruptions but to keep off the plague of sin. Chains and prisons are designed not so much to punish crimes as to prevent them. Our blessed Saviour reckons diseases to be "bonds." And Job called his distemper "the stocks" in which his feet were secured,

secured, and his "dunghill a prison." *Job* xiii. 27. And indeed no comparison could be more just. The stubborn and self-willed sinner is imprisoned, when the great King lays him on his bed, binds his hands and feet by sickness, and will not release him till he has brought humbly to implead the act of grace that is passed in his favour. Thus was this man tied by the heels for the space of thirty and eight years. Some will say when they are afflicted in body or visited with sickness, "I have caught cold; I have caught the small pox or the like;" but the truth is, that these diseases catch us. We are the prisoners, and they are the jailors, which bind and watch us. By these fetters we are restrained from wickedness, or at least from running so precipitately, as we otherwise should run, down the broad way which leadeth to destruction. David would thank Abigail for having withheld him from indulging a resentful spirit. "Blessed," saith he, "be thy advice, and blessed be thou who hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." *1 Sam.* xxv. 33. So should we praise the Lord for checking us in our mad career, and for hedging us around by affliction or any other means which he sees fit, that we might not foolishly rush into forbidden paths, and bring upon ourselves much mischief as well as be involved in much guilt. And when this is the case, forty years confinement upon a bed of languishing is so far from being the rigour of justice, that it is often an act of the greatest compassion and mercy to our souls. Let none therefore be offended at the conduct of the great King, who sometimes seems to deal hard with

some

some of his people, and makes them to smart
 long and severely under their crosses. There is
 an absolute necessity for this seeming severity.
 They cannot do without it. Why should the
 Judge release the prisoner, when he sees him pilfer-
 ing at his very trial in the court: If he steals while
 he is fettered, and in the face of the tribunal of
 justice: how much more villany would he commit,
 if he were at liberty, and had no human eye upon
 him? So God is often, as it were, obliged to
 prolong the sufferings of his children on account
 of their peevishness and discontent under them;
 and very good reason there is for it, because if
 they are so much under the influence of self-will
 when the rod is upon them: how rebellious and
 refractory would they be, if the rod was removed!
 But you will say, "how can any do evil, while
 their hands and feet are bound?" Why, though
 the body may be bound, yet the mind may be
 still free to do evil. And the sins of the mind
 are committed with much greater ease than any
 others. How many swords would an artist make
 in a day, if he could finish them without either
 forge, anvil, or hammer? Certainly he could fur-
 nish a whole army with them in a few hours. So
 the sin of the mind requires neither hands nor
 feet to set it in motion. It is as free and exten-
 sive as the thoughts or devices of the heart;
 quick as a shower of hail, and numerous as the
 sands upon the sea-shore. It is ever upon the
 wing; hard to be observed, and harder to be pre-
 vented; never satisfied or saying, it is enough,
 whether sins may pall upon the enjoyment or be
 laid aside from disgust: but the sins of the mind
 can never be fully compassed or enjoyed, and
 therefore they are ever upon the stretch, ever

growing in their demands, and still leaving a canine appetite behind them, till they are either conquered by sovereign grace or allayed by eternal torments. See then the reason why we are afflicted or scourged for thirty and eight years: it is because our love of sin and dislike of holiness continue so long.

“ When Jesus saw the man lie at the pool, “ and knew that he had been now a long time “ in that case,” he had pity on him, and soon restored him to health. It is no small matter for a man to cast his eye upon the distressed state of the poor, because the eye may sometimes affect the heart. When the one is caught, the other may melt. When we behold the woes of the needy and the ill usage of the oppressed, they are apt to trouble us and to excite our compassion. It is supposed that Pilate had this in view when he presented the dear Jesus in his mock-robe and bloody hue to the Jews, saying, “ behold the man!” But they shut their eyes and turned their faces from him, crying, “ away with him! away with him!” If they had fastened their attention upon him, and had deliberately examined him from head to foot, I should think that the sight must have softened their hearts, obdurate as they were and impenetrable as a rock of adamant. But they would not look at him, lest their bowels should yearn toward him, and their malice should abate. And the reason, why the wants of the destitute are more frequently relieved in our days, is because the rich seldom see their misery. Though an angel was often sent from heaven to trouble the water at Bethesda, yet this man lay under his infirmity for upwards of thirty years: and it

likely that he would have died *there* of his disease, if the Lord Jesus had not come himself to heal him. Oh! when our necessities are apparent, they speak for us when we are silent. Lazarus had no need to beg. His boils and ulcers were like so many tongues pleading for him, if Dives had but deigned to cast an eye upon him. Lord, let a sight of my wretchedness and spiritual maladies incline thy loving heart to commiserate and succour me! At Babel or the confusion of tongues it was the loudest voice that prevailed: but with the Lord it is he, "who holds his peace," that generally succeeds, *Exod.* xiv. 14. The compassionate Saviour anticipates the prayers of his people, as we may learn from the text. Before ever the sick man implored his help or asked for health, "Jesus said unto him, wilt thou be made whole?" Thus he called to our first parents after the fall, while they were fleeing from him and hiding themselves among the trees of the garden. He gave them a promise of deliverance before ever they desired it. And oh! he is still found of those who seek him not. He is like a spring of clear water by the way-side, that invites the thirsty traveller to come and drink at it: or, like a loaded tree that bends its branches, when its fruits are ripe, that they, who pass by, may pluck them off and eat. Yes, "as the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons," *Cant.* ii. 3. On the part of heaven, our desire may be fulfilled, and our hope shall not be ashamed. But then Jesus must have our will, such as it is. Hence he said to the impotent man, "wilt thou be made whole? Were there two persons sold as slaves to one man, and one of them was desir-

ous to be freed from his bondage, while the other refused to accept of his freedom; the last would certainly have none but himself to blame for the continuance of his captivity. And the former, who desired his discharge, would not be a whit the better for his desire, unless the master was pleased to grant him his liberty. So it is with us in a spiritual sense. "We have all, like "Israel, destroyed ourselves: but our help is in "God." *Hos. xiii. 9.* And though it is not the cause of our salvation, yet it is a very good sign, when God gives us a will to desire and seek for deliverance from our spiritual slavery. O that we were as earnest for the salvation of our souls, when we are enslaved by sin, as we are for the recovery of our bodily health, when we are pining with sickness! But alas! the desire of natural life is far more powerful in us all than the desire of a spiritual and eternal life. Be our situation ever so uneasy, and be our circumstances ever so distressing, yet we do not want to leave this earth. There is always something in it which courts our stay. This man, who had lain languishing at the pool of Bethesda for near forty years, was still willing to live. He doth not beg for his dismissal, but rather complains that he hath no friend to help him to a cure. And we do not read that the ancient patriarchs counted their time too long, when their lives were extended much beyond the present date. Though Jacob was an old man, yet when Pharaoh questioned him concerning his age, he answered, "few and evil have the days of the "years of my life been." *Gen. xlvii. 9.* And though Elijah wished for death while he was in a fit of despondency, yet he fled from it, when

when the hand of Jezebel was against him. The Lord hath encompassed Paradise with a most impregnable fence, not only "with a flaming sword" which turns every way to keep the way of the "tree of life," but with a guard of shining cherubs. But why was all this formidable armament against so timid and faint-hearted a creature as man? Oh! there was a tree in Paradise that could ensure life to such as did eat of its fruit: and to obtain this fruit, man, fearful man would have rushed upon the edge of the sword, or would have strove hard to pass through fire and water. Nay, though a weaker fence might have kept man out, yet it would not have been sufficient to keep out Satan: and if Satan had plundered this tree of its fruit, and had it in his power to bestow life upon his followers or to secure them from death; all the world would have gone after him, from the love that they bear to this earth, and the repugnancy that they feel to leave it. O what a happiness would it be for us all, if our affections were as much drawn out after eternal life, as they are set upon prolonging this temporal life! O that we laboured as much for the meat which endureth for ever, as we do for the meat which perisheth! But alas! we are all very deficient in this respect. We love life: and yet we prefer a moment before eternity. How astonishing is it, that this man, after lying near forty years at the pool of Bethesda and languishing out a life that was little better than a lingering death, should still be fond of living, and loath to die! "Sir," saith he, "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." But why wilt thou complain that thou

hadst no man to help thee? why dost thou not rather condemn thyself for putting so much confidence in such a broken reed, and for expecting any great matter from man? He acts his part in disappointing thy expectations. Such is man. He is deceit in the abstract. And hast not thou discovered thy weakness in trusting to deceit? Hast not thou been rightly served? Alas! many are full of complaints against the world and its treachery, who never find fault with themselves for their foolish attachment to such a treacherous world and secret dependence upon it. Do they not know that "it lieth in wickedness?" How then can they expect that it will impart that good to them which it doth not possess itself? That pretended friend, who always puts us off with falsehood and never utters one word of truth, is not surely to be believed. If we do at any time give him credit for what he saith, it is not he, but it is our own folly that deceives us. Nay, should he sometimes speak the truth deceitfully, that will only render him more dangerous. If, when a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arose in Israel, who gave a sign or a wonder that he might seduce them after other gods, and that sign or wonder came to pass, that prophet or dreamer of dreams was to be put to death: but if the sign or wonder did not come to pass, he might live as none would in that case be seduced by him from their allegiance to the true God. See *Deut. xiii.* Notorious liars can do no hurt, because none but madmen will hearken to them. Well: the world hath been a liar for more than five thousand years: and I do not see what reason we have to suppose that it will deal more honestly with us than with any of our predecessors. If

we read our bibles we shall find that it always played the cheat with all who relied upon it. As long as we are in health, it may seem to smile upon us and to promise us great support: but when we sicken and put it to the test, it is sure to fail us in the hour of danger; just as the Amalekite master left his Egyptian servant behind him, "when he fell sick". 1 Sam. xxx. 13. This is still the custom of the world: it leaves those behind, who cannot follow it. But with God it is not so: He takes up those who are wounded and half-dead that he may revive and heal them. When they are abandoned by all others, he signals his regard for them. When they are faint and ready to perish, he lays them in his bosom that he may cherish and foster them. Yes, blessed be his name, when it is straitest with us, there is most enlargement with God. "When our father and mother forsake us, the Lord taketh us up." *Psal.* xxvii. 10. When the world rejects us, God receives us. When nature casts us out, grace takes us in. When earthly friends disown us, the friend of sinners embraces us as the purchase of his blood and the heirs of his kingdom. When the young ravens are thrust out of the nest that they may shift for themselves, the Lord himself doth not disdain to feed them. *Psal.* cxlvii. 9. Where the world is most sparing there God is most liberal. Thus in India, where physicians are scarce, they have abundance of physical herbs, which under God, are a present remedy in many diseases. So our land in Wales is far from supplying us with that plenty of good things which the English soil produces: and yet the heavens are as open to us as to our neighbouring brethren, if not more so. What then sayest thou, O weak

and sickly man, in the text? "I have no man. *"Hominem non habeo."* Thou hast no man! But thou hast what is much better. Thou hast a Saviour who pities thee, and is come to make thee whole. And man's extremity is God's opportunity. Much to this purpose is what is recorded of Joseph in the forty-first chapter of Genesis. Two long years did he wait to hear from Pharaoh's servant, to whom he had committed the management of his cause. All this time the Lord suffered him to lie in prison, because he had put his trust in an arm of flesh. But as soon as he was brought to say, "I have no man:" straightway his deliverance came, and the prison doors flew open to him. When Daniel could obtain no favour from men, but was sealed down in the lion's den, the most High sent his angel to preserve him, and to seal the lions mouths. The like mercy was shewn to the three worthies in the fiery furnace. And Moses experienced the same paternal care from above, as he lay in the bulrushes on the banks of the Nile. If therefore there be any of you who are ready to renew the complaint in the text and to say, "I have no man, &c." let me direct you to the dear Lord Jesus, and adopt the words of Pilate, saying, "*ecce homo!* behold the man who can heal your every malady, and save you from all your sins. O look unto this man, poor souls, and he will make far more haste to succour and deliver you than any of those blessed angels, who come flying upon the wings of the wind." O dear, dear Jesus! there was no man that pitied thee or shewed thee any favour in the days of thy flesh. But in thee we found a man, when thou didst assume our nature, who was willing to

shed his blood and lay down his life even for his enemies. Behold! thou art He, who manifestest thy love to those who discovered the greatest ill-will to thee. O may thy pure and expensive love win our hearts to thee, and bow our stubborn wills into humble subjection to thy gentle sway! may we look unto thee and be saved!

When no man would pity the diseased person in my text, and he could see no prospect of deliverance from any other quarter, Jesus saith unto him, "arise, take up thy bed and walk": and such efficacy accompanied his words that the poor cripple instantly obeyed him, and was made whole. The usual method with the sick is to recover gradually, after their pains are assuaged and the violence of their disorder begins to subside: but it is not so with this man. He immediately recovered from his long illness, "took up his bed and walked." Hence we may learn that God can convert a soul in a moment, and enrich the needy with the graces of his Spirit by one word speaking. In the creation of the world He said, "let there be light: and there was light." In the renewal of our fallen souls, He gives the command, and it is done. Where he sets his love, he discovers it by its immediate effects. There is a present death unto sin, and there is a present new-birth unto righteousness. When our Lord informed Martha "that her brother should rise again;" she thought that it would be at some very distant period, or on the great resurrection-morn: but he soon convinced her that his love was not so slow in its operations, and that her brother should even in that hour be raised from the grave. It was a saying of *Chrysostom* that "unskilful
" physicians

“ physicians are no better than butchers who
 “ kill their patients outright, and that such as
 “ are most skilful among them are but botchers
 “ who patch up our fleshy tabernacle and try to
 “ mend our rotten carcases that they may hold
 “ out as long as they can.” But the blessed
 Saviour, as the head-master of all arts, performs
 all his works effectually and without delay. As
 the chief physician he made this man whole at
 once, so that he, who had been before feeble,
 was now wonderfully strengthened; and he, who
 had been before diseased, was now perfectly
 healed. And that he might satisfy all beholders
 that his cure was real and that he was restored
 to a capacity of enjoying his bodily health, he
 took up his bed before them all, and walked;
 walked into the temple, that he might give God
 thanks for his recovery, and afford a good sign
 that his soul was well. May each of us, whom
 the Lord hath restored to spiritual health, go and
 do so likewise! may we “ sin no more, lest a
 “ worse thing come unto us!” O that we may
 take up our cross daily, and be enabled as an
 evidence of our conversion to walk in newness
 of life!

Here some may again object and say, “ doth
 “ not our Lord seem to be niggardly in the
 “ distribution of his merciful cures, when out of
 “ such a multitude of blind, halt, and withered,
 “ he healed but one impotent man? Was not he
 “ too sparing of his favours, when there were so
 “ many more, who were in great need of his
 “ help?” With regard to this point I must ob-
 serve that *sense* is a very bad interpreter, and by
 no means a competent judge both of the things
 which our Lord hath done, and of the things

which

which he left undone. Who but he can tell, whether the recovery of the other impotent folks, who lay at the pool of Bethesda, would have been to their advantage or to their hurt? might not full health have proved more detrimental to them than a lingering illness? might not the cure of their bodies have ended in the ruin of their souls? But *Tertullian* assigns another reason for our Lord's conduct in this respect, which seems to be full to the purpose and satisfactory. He thinks that as the use and efficacy of this pool were now to cease; so our Saviour, by healing the most infirm and by setting him at liberty who had lain longest there, would thereby give a plain intimation unto all the rest, who were sick and waiting for the troubling of the water, to leave the pool and follow him that he might cure all their maladies. The language of this miracle was this: "hear me, all ye expectants at Bethesda, and let your souls live. If you want health, stay no longer at this pool waiting for the troubling of the water: for, when the angel did descend for this purpose, and were he still to continue his visits hither, no more than one would be healed at a time. But now the virtues of this pool are gone. I have now superseded all its sanative qualities. Spend therefore no more of your time here: but come unto me with all your complaints about you, and I will restore you to health and ease. In me you shall find the true anti-type of this Bethesda, who can make you all whole at once." When our Lord was come himself to be the sole physician of his people, he would no more suffer this Bethesda to rob him of his glory; but he would now dry it up or despoil

Spoil it of all its virtues. And seeing we are still
 so prone to fly for help to any one else rather than
 to him, and to lean upon any thing besides him,
 even upon our hearing, praying, and communi-
 cating; the Lord, who is jealous of his honour,
 and will not "give his praise to graven images,"
 is constrained, as it were, to embitter all our
 false rests to us, just as the nurse, who would
 wean her child, puts wormwood to her breast,
 that she may render her milk distasteful and un-
 palatable. He drains every well of creature-
 comfort, that he may lead us beyond all means,
 and teach us to look unto Him alone for salva-
 tion. Because Israel might think that there was
 some inherent virtue in man or in gold, Moses
 was ordered to set up a *serpent* and not a man;
 a serpent of *brass* and not of gold, to which they
 might look and be healed, when they were bit-
 ten by the fiery scorpions. So the Lord sends
 not angels to preach his gospel but men; not
 the rich but often the poor; not the letter-learn-
 ed, but such as have been deeply trained in the
 school of the cross. Why? That He may secure
 the whole glory of our salvation to himself, as
 well as keep us from idolizing the instruments
 whom he employs. So in the sacraments, what
 are there to be found but water in baptism and
 bread and wine at his table; not Elijah's feast but
 Lazarus's fare; not abundance but a crumb, a
 crumb to whet our appetite, that we may hunger
 more for the bread of life. And why are we so
 often cold, heavy, and dead in our prayers, but
 that we may be taught, that prayer is not our
 salvation; but that dear Redeemer, who quick-
 ens, animates, and warms our souls by his Spirit
 in prayer. Let me therefore now draw towards

a conclusion by inviting poor sinners to come to the Lord Jesus Christ through and over every thing else. And may God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant that a blessing from above may accompany what hath been, or shall be yet spoken upon this subject.

For your encouragement to come boldly to a throne of grace consider

1. The gracious nature of the Lord, and his readiness to shew mercy to the miserable. Aliens may pick something here that suits their case. What the servants of Benhadad said concerning the kings of Israel is infinitely more applicable to the King of kings. "We have heard," said they, "that they are merciful kings." *1 Kings xx. 31.* Let none of you then say, "my unworthiness is such, that I dare not lift up my voice for mercy:" but say rather, "my guilt and misery are such, that I am constrained by absolute necessity to look unto Jesus for pardon and peace, or to perish in my sins." You can beg heaven though you cannot purchase it. You can receive mercy as a free-gift though you cannot merit it. Poverty, or a sense of want, both not hinder a man from being a right beggar: but it qualifies him to be such. So the sense of your sins should not drive you *from*, but *to* the mercy-seat. This was the course that David took when he laboured under deep convictions. "Innumerable evils," saith he, "compass me about: Mine iniquities have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up: They are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart faileth because of them. Be pleased therefore, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me," *Psal. xl. 12, 13.* A
sense

sense of unworthiness doth not utterly subvert every degree of confidence in God. The children of Israel in Isaiah's day, though convinced of the greatness of their sins, would not yet quite despair of having them forgiven. "Unclean as we are," say they, "and loathsome as filthy rags as are all our righteousnesses, yet thou, O Lord, art our father. Be not wroth very sore: neither remember iniquity for ever. Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people." *Isaiab* lxiv. 6, 8, 9. So however unworthy any of you may be of the divine favour, yet if you are returning penitents, you may expect that God will hear your sorrowful groaning, and grant your faint requests. The sower may sow his seed with a very weak, unsteady hand, and yet he cheerfully awaits for a plentiful harvest. Though he sows in tears, yet he hopes to reap with joy. O that you could thus pray in faith and wait in hope till you have received the blessing! Your unworthiness can be no bar against its coming. For, though you have no worth in yourselves, yet Jesus is worthy; and if you go unto the Father in his name, you are sure to be accepted and to obtain what you need. Under the old law it was a capital offence to offer any sacrifice without the priest. In like manner must we have the great high priest of our profession to present our persons and services before the throne of grace, before we can find acceptance. He, who ventures thither in any other way, but under the shadow of the crucified Jesus, or trusting in any thing besides his perfect worth and work, shall be "cut off from the congregation of the Lord." *Lev.* xvii. 3, 4, 5. "No oil or frankincense was to be put upon the sin-offering,"

point out to us that it is neither the sweetness nor the richness of our duties that recommends us to God, but the worthiness of our kind and compassionate Intercessor. And they, who are most self-empried, have always the greatest interest with him. Witness his dealings with the poor publican; with the humble centurion, who thought himself to be so unworthy that he could not ask Jesus to come under his roof; and with the woman of Canaan, who had such a mean opinion of herself that she was contented with the bare refuse of her neighbour's rich privileges. Oh! no beggar was ever too poor to be an object of charity. Hold out therefore thy hand, poor sinner, that thou mayest receive the bounty of the great King. Keep it open before him, though it may be still palsied and trembling.

2. Another motive to encourage your approach to the Saviour is his gracious invitation. "Ho!" saith he, "every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he, who hath no money: come ye buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not: Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." *Isa. lv. 1, 2.* Arise, sinner, the master calls thee. Go to him, and when thou goest, say unto him as Samuel said unto Eli, "Behold I here I am: for, thou didst call me, Lord, I have obtained strength from thee to come for a little water, if I cannot get wine and milk. I have brought no money in my hand, because thou didst invite me to come without money."

“and without price. If I have no grace, I come
 “at thy call to receive grace. If I cannot ad-
 “dress thee as my Father, I may at least plead
 “that I am *fatherless*, because I utterly renounce
 “every other dependance but thee: and in
 “thee, I am told, the fatherless findeth mercy.”

Hos. xiv. 3. “Is there mercy shewn to such as
 “are orphans after the flesh: and shall there be
 “nothing done for those, who are orphans in
 “a spiritual sense? If I am not thy son: may I
 “not be adopted into that relation to thee? Oh!
 “is there no blessing left for poor me. Bless
 “me, even me, O Lord, I will not arise from
 “this supplicating posture, till thou hast heard
 “and helped me. I cannot go from hence, till
 “thou hast spoken peace to my wounded soul.
 “And oh! where else can I go? Thou alone
 “hast the words of eternal life. I dare not cry,
 “be righteous to me a sinner. But I do and
 “must still cry, till my tongue hath cleaved to
 “the roof of my mouth; God, be merciful to
 “me a sinner.”

3. Another motive to excite the diseased and
 languishing to look unto Jesus Christ for de-
 liverance is his all-sufficiency to save the vilest of
 sinners. “It pleased the Father that in him all
 “fulness should dwell.” *Col. i. 19.* His obe-
 dience unto death hath laid a sure foundation for
 peace with God, and opened a channel through
 which the current of his mercy may flow to the
 greatest offenders. So that now God can be just
 and yet the justifier of the ungodly. All, who
 in their extremity come unto him in that new
 and living way which the dear Jesus hath conse-
 crated through the veil of his flesh, may be
 healed of all their maladies, and saved to the ut-
 termost.

termost. O then cry aloud unto Him, poor
 sinner, and say, " O Lord, I do not come unto
 " thee to seek that which is not to be found.
 " No: there is enough with thee of what I need.
 " Look upon the face of thine appointed, and
 " for his sake be thou well-pleased with me. Is
 " there not in him a full supply for all my
 " wants? is there not righteousness enough in
 " him to cover all my unrighteousness? are there
 " not riches enough in him to answer all my
 " poverty? Oh! must I die without pardon,
 " when there is atoning blood always before
 " thee, that speaketh better things than the
 " blood of Abel." *Heb. xii. 24.* " Oh! must I
 " lie in my disease and roll in the filth of my
 " pollutions for ever, when there is with thee a
 " fountain that was on purpose opened for wash-
 " ing away sin and uncleanness." *Zec. xiii. 1.*
 " O send me not away without some mark of
 " thy favour, when there is so much mercy laid
 " up in thy Christ for the use of the miserable.
 " O dear Lord Jesus! intercede for me a lost
 " sinner, and send thy Spirit to seal a full pardon
 " in thy blood to my poor distressed soul." If
 such powerful pleas do not succeed; and the
 load of thy guilt still remains unremoved; con-
 sider farther the offices of the Lord Jesus as Me-
 diator, and urge *them* as auxiliaries which may
 give additional weight to thy humble suit. As
 he hath received gifts for men, even for the re-
 bellious: so do thou own and plead, " a rebel
 " am, who have been a transgressor from the
 " womb, and a traitor all the days of my life
 " against thy crown and dignity: but oh! is
 " there none in the court of heaven to intercede
 " for such as have broken thy laws, and trans-
 " gressed thy commandments?"

"pled upon thine authority? Is not the Lord
 "Jesus an ever-living intercessor for such? And
 "shall not his plea prevail? Shall not his voice
 "be heard? Begone, begone, O unbelief, and
 "keep off, I will not listen to thy suggestions,
 "I believe that the blood of Jesus pleads; that
 "the bowels of Jesus plead; that the Spirit of
 "Jesus pleads continually for sinners at the
 "right hand of God: and oh! am not I one of
 "them? Yes, I know that I am a sinner; and
 "therefore I believe that Jesus intercedes for
 "me, even for me, unworthy as I am of the
 "least of all his mercies. Let the law then
 "thunder out its curses, and let justice demand
 "its rigid due. Neither of them can touch
 "me, because I am covered all over with the
 "blood of Jesus Christ."

Come thus, poor sinners, and lay open all your
 maladies before the Saviour. Conceal not your
 misery, but expose it to his view. He may still
 have mercy upon the vilest and the most unwor-
 thy among you. O throw yourselves in the
 way by which this king of Zion passes. Take
 example from the common beggars, who not on-
 ly appeal to the passengers by their cries, but
 make bare their blind eyes, lame feet, and rag-
 ged backs, that they may excite compassion and
 obtain relief. O do as they do in this respect.
 And who knows but that He, whose heart yearns
 at human woe, will bid you "go in peace and
 "sin no more."

The *last* motive, that I shall mention in order
 to stir you up to go clearly and wholly to Jesus
 Christ for salvation, is the generosity of his dis-
 position. He is a cheerful giver, "who giveth
 "liberally, and upbraideth not." *James i. 5.* He

is more importunate with sinners, while he intreats them to receive, than they are when they beseech him to bestow his mercies. The water doth not come to us from a pump or well with the same facility that it descends from the clouds: it is but to receive it from the one, whilst it must be drawn and pumped from the other. So the Lord Jesus pours down his bounties on the wretched; and throws in his grace to the hearts of such as are ready to perish, whilst we must court our fellow-men for the least kindness that they can impart unto us, and as it were, extort it from them by the force of intreaties. O that there were more of us sensible of our spiritual wants, that we may be more pressing in our cries for grace at the footstool of mercy! Heaven then would have less cause to complain, "that we will not come to Jesus, that we may have life."

John v. 40. With Him we are sure to speed. O that he would give us hearts to be but in earnest with him in imploring the blessings which we need! O that he would enlarge our narrow souls, that we might take in the fulness of his grace! There is enough in him to supply our every want. And oh! such is the bountiful nature of our God, that He sometimes gives us before we ask and often more than we do ask of him. Isaac and Rebekah prayed for a child, and God gave them two sons. The thief upon the cross desired only to be remembered by the Saviour when he should ascend his heavenly throne, and he was on the same day admitted into Paradise, that he might share in the glory of his triumphant Lord. Let me persuade you therefore, my dear friends, to let go every other hope, that you may wrestle with this merciful Redeemer, and lay hold upon him:

him alone, as all your salvation and all your desire. Make him your all in all, and he will assuredly bless you with all the blessings of the new covenant. Adopt the resolution of the penitents in Jeremiah, and say, " behold ! we come
 " unto thee ; for, thou art the Lord our God.
 " We have leaned too long upon false gods, and
 " in vain have hoped for salvation from the hills
 " and mountains. All other refuges have failed
 " us. They have proved to us like the reeds of
 " Egypt, piercing our hands when we came to
 " lean upon them instead of yielding us any
 " support. But we are now brought to be of
 " the mind, that we will henceforth trust in none
 " but in thee : for, from thee alone cometh the
 " salvation of Israel. We have chosen thee for
 " our only portion : and in the strength of thy
 " grace we will invariably adhere unto thee as
 " long as we live." O let nothing keep you
 from the Saviour; neither works nor duties; nei-
 ther friends nor foes. Give up all, that you may
 secure this pearl of great price. Forego every
 advantage and relinquish every connection in this
 world for his sake. Be willing to leap with Peter
 into the sea at his command, that you may come
 at him. *Matt. xiv. 29.* One of the first lessons,
 which are taught in the school of Christ, is this :
 " if any man will come after me, let him deny
 " himself, take up his cross daily and follow
 " me." *Luke ix. 23.* Oh ! there is as much
 difference between a fluctuating and a steady
 heart, as there was between Ruth and Orpah.
 When Naomi told Orpah that she had no more
 sons to give her, and that the hand of the
 Lord was heavy against her; Orpah was soon
 disheartened, " kissed her mother-in-law, and

"went back to her people." But Ruth would neither leave her nor return from her; but being determined at all events to cast in her lot with her and to share in her circumstances, whether they should prove prosperous or adverse, said "Intreat me not to leave thee; or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God."

Ruth i. 16. Being thus firm as a new and well-rigged ship she could withstand the efforts of wind and tide. And oh! if our love to the Saviour cannot endure a little calumny and reproach, a few hardships and crosses; it is too weak, and we have reason to suspect the safety of our spiritual condition. If the heat of persecution or the cold of affliction scare us from him, it is plain that we do not yet know his full worth. Come therefore to him, my brethren, through fire and water. Be separated from the unclean. Fly to Jesus on the wings of faith: if you cannot fly, run: if you cannot run, walk: if you cannot walk, crawl towards him on your hands and knees. And may He, who beheld the prodigal while he was yet a great way off and ran to meet him, cast an eye of love upon every returning penitent among you, and open his arms of mercy to receive you into his fostering bosom! Amen and Amen.

S E R M O N III.

P S A L M lxxv. 5.

By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation.

THOUGH God answers the prayers of his people by terrible things; yet all his dealings with them are conducted with equity, and He still remains, notwithstanding their severest trials and greatest hardships, the God of their salvation and the sure anchor of their souls. This is the observation, which I propose at this time to illustrate from scripture-history as the leading truth contained in my text, and to confirm by endeavouring to assign some reasons for the divine procedure in this respect, or by shewing *why* it is that the Lord answers the prayers of his chosen by terrible things. May the Spirit of truth guide me through this mysterious and unfrequented path, that I may not darken counsel by words without knowledge!

It is one of the revealed characteristicks of Jehovah, that He is "fearful in praises, doing wonders." *Exod. xv. 11.* And David describes him as "terrible out of his holy places." *Psal. lxxviii. 35.* In the sanctuary the Lord usually cleared the doubts of the faithful, and manifested his

his love to their souls. But this was not always the case. He sometimes enveloped himself there in a dark cloud, and sent forth his judgments abroad, which were terrible not only to his enemies but likewise to his friends. Though He is a God who heareth prayer, yet he is not bound to answer our requests in the manner that we desire, or at the season that we expect. No: this is a part of his prerogative or sovereignty, which He hath still reserved in his own power. Hence his people, who are all a praying generation, have often received such answers to their prayers as were very unexpected as well as very unpleasant for the time present. Thus the bringing of Israel out of Egypt was a gracious answer to many a prayer, that had been presented before a throne of grace for their deliverance, as we are told *Exod. iii. 7, 8*, where the Lord himself saith, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters: for, I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land that floweth with milk and honey." Yet they were delivered in such a manner as often made their hearts to tremble and to faint within them. Moses's application to Pharaoh on their behalf served only at first to exasperate that tyrant's heart against them, and to render their situation more wretched than it was before. It seemed at the outset to have no other effect, but "to put a sword in the hands of their oppressors to slay them." Nay, Moses himself is puzzled, and doth not know how to reconcile the divine conduct with the divine promise, as we

we may learn from his hasty expostulation with God upon this trying occasion. "Wherefore," saith he, "hast thou so evil intreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me to them?" For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered this people at all." Their tasks were doubled instead of being lessened. And that straw, which had been before allowed them to burn their bricks with, was now denied to them, and they were compelled to gather it wherever they could find it throughout all the land of Egypt. This appeared a very unlikely way of delivering them. To human view it had a far stronger tendency to rivet their chains, and perpetuate their slavery; if not to destroy them utterly, and to root out their memorial from the earth. So we still pray for the conversion of souls and the increase of the Messiah's kingdom: but many, when they are first awakened and feel the bitterness of deep convictions, are little disposed to thank us for our pains. They are brought to such distress of mind, that they almost wish that they had been left to themselves, and had not discontinued their former enjoyments. "Our old religion that was born with us," say they, "used to sit easy upon us. If we went to church on a Sunday, conscience was satisfied, and we thought that all was safe. But ever since we have set in earnest about the salvation of our souls, we cannot enjoy a moment's ease. We are ever, as it were upon the rack. We see so many sins in all that we are and in all that we do, that we tremble lest vengeance should overtake us, while we lie under such a heavy load."

" of guilt. We never suspected that we were
 " such guilty and defiled creatures before.
 " Alas! we fear that there is no mercy for us; no
 " pardon for our atrocious deeds; no covert for
 " our naked souls; no cleansing for our polluted
 " hearts; no renewal for our fallen and corrupt
 " nature. For, ever since these heart-searching
 " preachers have come and spoken unto us, our
 " state is worse than ever it was. We can dis-
 " cover nothing in ourselves but sin and misery.
 " And oh! what renders our case still the more
 " deplorable is, that we find no likelihood of
 " the promised deliverance. Instead of being
 " set at liberty as we expected, our bondage
 " seems to be increased. Satan enslaves us.
 " The world is against us. And what we never
 " experienced before, we feel a war in our mem-
 " bers that sorely galls and wounds us. Iniqui-
 " ties prevail against us: and the more we strive
 " against their power we sin and stumble but the
 " more. Though we have redoubled the watch,
 " and are found more diligent than ever under
 " the means of grace and in the path of duty;
 " yet our burthens become heavier instead of
 " being removed. We can lay hold upon no
 " promise. We can conceive no gleam of hope.
 " With all our doings and sufferings for righte-
 " ousness sake, we are sinking faster and faster
 " in the vale of sorrow. O God, why hast thou
 " at all entertained thoughts of our deliverance,
 " since thy kind intentions have hitherto answered
 " no other purpose, but to perplex and harass
 " us." Such hath been the language of many
 " God's dearest children, when they have been
 " first convinced of sin, and the law hath been ap-
 " plied by the holy Spirit like a *causid* to their
 " consciences.

consciences. Though their sufferings for the time were the fruit of much prayer, and a needful preparatory to their salvation; yet they have been ready to despond under them, and to conclude that they were sent to consume rather than to save them.

Nor is it at their first awakening alone that they are exercised with such apprehensions, No: in the after-stages of the divine life they meet with such hard trials and sharp conflicts, as often lead them to question God's love to their souls, and to fancy that his face is still turned against them. Witness the complaints of the Israelites against Moses by the Red sea. Though God had very unexpectedly wrought their deliverance by doubling their tasks in Egypt, and had brought them out of that house of bondage with a very high hand; yet they are no sooner reduced to any extremity than they doubt either his will or his power to save them, and relapse into their former frame. "Was it," say they to Moses, "because thou hast taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us? carry us forth out of Egypt?" *Exod. xiv. 11.* But this distress, like the former, was necessary to humble their pride and to keep them dependent upon the Lord. So prone were they to forget this salutary lesson, that they had continual need to have it inculcated upon them by frequent disasters and repeated crosses. God might have led them in a few days to the mount of his sanctuary: but He saw it expedient to carry them for the space of forty years through a wild and desolate wilderness, where there were serpents and fiery scorpions to annoy and wound them.

them, and where many thousands of them died. Now, all this was in answer to prayer : and however it might seem a round-about way, yet it was the only way in which they might safely be conducted to Canaan. They suffered no real loss upon the whole. For it is said " that the " Lord led them about, instructed them, and " kept them as the apple of his eye." *Deut.* xxxii. 10. May we learn from God's dealings with Israel not to be disconcerted at any of his frowning providences, or dismayed at our struggles with indwelling sin ! Though He may deny us that blessing which we may seem to want, or refuse us that immediate victory over our corruptions which we may ardently desire ; yet He may bestow upon us *that* which is far more conducive to our best interest, such as patience to bear our cross, and grace to fight manfully in our christian warfare. He knows our make, and will consult our welfare in all his dispensations towards us. O that we could give up ourselves wholly to his management, that in the darkest night of desertion and under the most piercing scourge of his afflictive rod, we may say with Job " though he slay me, yet will I trust in " him !"

Another remarkable answer to prayer was the coming of our Lord in the flesh. He had been long foretold and long expected. At last he appeared in our nature. At length the Messiah who was the dear desire of every nation, came suddenly into his temple, and realized all the types and shadows ; all the promises and prophecies which had gone forth concerning him. " But " who could abide the day of his coming ? Who " could stand before him, when he appeared like

“ a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap?” *Mal.* iii. 2. Though he then came full of grace and truth; meek as a lamb and harmless as a dove; yet that heavenly fire which proceeded from him to burn the dross and to refine the spirits of his people, was sometimes very hot and scorching. And his first coming into every ransomed soul is not still without much terror and great dismay. We sometimes think that He is coming to kill us, when he only comes to save us from our sins. Oh! to be divorced from our idols and separated from our beloved lusts goes very near our hearts. It is to us like tearing the flesh from the bones. And we are ready to cry out, “ to what purpose shall we live when they have taken away our gods, and deprived us of our sweetest enjoyments?” Yet the sword of the Spirit must divide asunder the workings of the flesh from the workings of the Spirit, whatever pangs the operation may cost us, before we can be made partakers of that full salvation which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our *Isaacs* must be sacrificed. Our bosom sins must become hateful unto us. Would you have *another* example to illustrate the observation which I deduced from the text? Then take it from the dear Immanuel himself, He, during the days of his humiliation, prayed saying, “ Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” *John xvii. 1.* The Father heard him, and granted his request. He gave him a name that is above every name. He exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour, in whom all power in heaven and on earth should be vested. Yet “ it behoved him first to suffer the agonies of the cross, before he entered into his glory.” *Luke xxiv. 26.*

Thus

Thus was even the prayer of the Lord Jesus himself answered by terrible things, yea, such things as made him to cry out in the anguish of his soul more than once: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will but thine be done." But shall we forbear prayer, because God may answer us in a manner that may be very unexpected as well as distressing for a season? O no: He is a God, who still hears prayer, and takes pleasure in the voice of his spouse. He loves to be importuned. None are set at liberty from the yoke of sin and the chains of Satan, but such as He hath stirred up to be fervent suitors before his mercy-seat. And He may sometimes deny our requests or give us what we do not like, that He may cut us out more work for prayer. Jacob wrestled with God for a blessing on himself and his family: but when he prevailed with God in his suit, he was lamed and enfeebled in the strongest part of his body as a wrestler, that he might renew his cries for fresh strength. *Gen. xxxii. 25.* David called upon the Lord in his distress; and God heard his voice out of his holy temple. But how was he answered? By the most terrible convulsions of nature, expressed by the strongest images which could be conceived. "Then the earth," saith he, "shook and trembled: the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils; and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down: and darkness was under his feet. He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made

“darkness his secret place: his pavilion round
 “about him were dark waters and thick clouds
 “of the skies. The Lord also thundered in
 “the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice;
 “hailstones and coals of fire.” One would expect that all this awful armament was intended to crush poor David into nothing, or to execute signal vengeance upon him for all the sinful errors of his life: but it was ordained for a very different purpose; to deliver and not to destroy him. Hence the psalmist adds: “He sent from
 “above, he took me, he drew me out of many
 “waters.” *Psal. xviii. 6—16.* In all these instances we see the position in my text clearly proved, or that “God answers the prayers of
 “his people sometimes by terrible things in
 “righteousness.” I proceed therefore, in dependence on divine strength, secondly, to assign some reasons for the divine procedure in this respect. Whatever aspect some of the Lord’s dealings with his people may at times wear, they are not only designed but have all a gracious tendency.

1. To crucify the flesh. And oh! what death is more terrible than this crucifixion? We would always pray for sweet and pleasant things, such as are suitable to our palate and refreshing to our animal nature. We are all for the honey without any mixture of the gall. We like well enough to reign with the Saviour: but we cannot bear the thoughts of suffering with him. Though we are spirit as well as flesh, yet our prayers are in general too carnal; seeking only the ease and gratification of the flesh. But our spirits have an equal, if not a superior claim to our attention: and God’s answers, whatever we may ask, are spiritual; tending chiefly to the mortification of

our sins and the subdual of our corruptions: This we may not desire: and hence we may be often led to think, that God answers our prayers by such terrible things as we neither wanted nor expected. The two sons of Zebedee, having their minds intent upon promotion in the kingdom of our Lord, begged that they might sit the one on his right, and the other on his left hand. *Matt. xx. 21.* Now, there was no harm in all this. Nay, the request was good in itself, respecting the matter of it. Why then did our Lord say to them, “you know not what you ask?” He said it not because there was no exaltation in his kingdom, or because their desire was altogether sinful: but because their motive was wrong, and they sought only to exalt self. In order therefore to convince them of their mistake and to slay their carnality, he asked them, “are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” As if he had said; “you seek only your own ease and your own grandeur: but the glory of my kingdom and the fruits of my Spirit can only be enjoyed by crucifying the flesh.” So we, when we pray that our sins may be forgiven, think that we cannot ask for any thing that is more sweet or desirable: but when we so reckon it, we do not count all the cost. It is true that the forgiveness of our sins or a sense of pardoning mercy in our souls is a most delicious feast: yet it is not so pure and unmixed as we might at first expect. Where sin is pardoned, there must be a rending of the heart, a dradness to the world, a renewal of nature, a love of holiness, and an earnest desire to mortify every hidden as well as open corruption. And when

we consider that all these things are death to flesh and blood, it is no wonder that many of us go drooping, when we ought to rejoice in God our Saviour. Having taken it for granted that we should be all blessedness when our sins were forgiven, we are surprised when we find that our corruptions die so hard, and are too apt to conclude because we are not all peace and joy in believing, that we are yet in our sins, and have never received pardon. But whenever this gloom comes over us, we should remember that sin must be mortified as well as forgiven. And the tears, which we shed for the remaining hardness of our hearts, may be a surer evidence of our reconciliation with God than our liveliest frames or sweetest feelings. By the anguish of our spirits and the abhorrence of ourselves we may be driven nearer to the Saviour, that He may refine us from our dross, and prepare us for glory.

2. God answers the prayers of his people by terrible things, because the way to the crown is by the cross. The best and most suitable method, in which it pleased the all-wise God to exalt his own Son, was by sufferings. "For it became
 " him, for whom are all things, and by whom
 " are all things, in bringing many sons unto
 " glory, to make the captain of their salvation
 " perfect through sufferings." *Heb. ii. 10.* Every kind of means, that could possibly be devised, was within the reach of *his* choice to whom all power belongs: but He, in his great wisdom, pitched upon the way of suffering as the most proper to answer his purpose. And this for the most part is the usual way by which the Lord in every age conducts his members to those mansions of glory, which He hath provided for them.

Hence

Hence the church of Christ is often reduced to such straits that in the eyes of the world she is quite forsaken and cast down: and her distress is so great that in her own apprehension she seems to be utterly desolate, and thus pours forth the voice of her groaning, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top. Mine enemies reproach me all the day: and they, who are mad against me, are sworn against me. For, I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping." *Psal. cii. 6—9.* Indeed this is not her constant fare. There are times in which the Lord upholds the feet of his saints that "none of their steps may slide:" or, if they do fall, He raises them with his own right hand. Heaviness and weeping may sometimes endure for a night: but in the morning joy and deliverance await them. And commonly, and indeed most commonly, they experience the greatest hardships at the approach of their sweetest mercies. It is darkest with them just before the dawn of the brightest day. Thus the children of Israel were laid, as it were, in an iron furnace in Egypt, and had their bones scattered at Babylon, when the Lord was about to work the most signal deliverances for them. Oh! the people of God are often heard to flutter and complain like a bird in the snare. They are so confined in the prison of unbelief or hampered in the fetters of hard-heartedness, that they can neither lay hold upon any promise nor feel the least liberty in their souls. "But why doth the Lord bring them to such a state of distress?" That he may punish them for their sins, and prepare them for the reception of his mercies.

Their

Their folly calls for the scourge. " My wounds
 " stink," saith David, " and are corrupt because
 " of my foolishness. I am troubled: I am bowed
 " down greatly: I go mourning all the day long.
 " There is no soundness in my flesh because of
 " thine anger: neither is there any rest in my
 " bones because of my sin." *Psal.* xxxviii. 3, 5,
 6. Alas! long do they grieve a gracious God
 by their iniquities, and trespass upon his patience
 by their rebellion and perverseness. Hence He
 is often heard to utter such complaints as these
 against them, " Israel doth not know: my people
 " doth not consider. They continue impenitent
 " in their sins. They drink in iniquity like
 " water, and are fitted with all manner of un-
 " cleanness. They will not confess their trans-
 " gressions, and their uncircumcised heart will
 " not bow to my yoke. Wherefore I will leave
 " them to themselves, till they acknowledge
 " their offence, and seek my face. In their af-
 " fliction they will return and seek me early."
 And oh! when they are thus left to themselves,
 and would fain with the prodigal son " feed
 " upon the husks which the swine do eat, while
 " no man gives unto them;" they then perceive
 the value of their father's house, and are glad to
 accept of the lowest office in it. Oh! sanctified
 adversity carries the richest pearl in its mouth.
 It makes sin hateful to us, and the return of the
 Saviour's presence doubly sweet. By it we are
 made meet for the master's use. As new casks
 are scalded, that the savour of the wood may not
 give a distaste to the liquor with which they are
 to be filled: so doth the Lord by fiery trials sea-
 son his children for the reception of his covenant-
 blessings. If He were to bless us according to

the cravings of our nature, or to bestow upon us the bounties of his providence, while we are unhumbled and have never been cleansed from our sins; we should grow more proud and self-sufficient than we naturally are, and our greatest mercies would prove our greatest curse. We may be praying for comfort, when we are not ripe to receive it. We may be asking for some earthly gift which, if it were given to us according to our foolish wishes, might be our bane. We cannot tell what is best for us. But we do know that the cross is exceedingly useful to us on many accounts. If we were not to feel the guilt of sin, we should never fly to the Saviour. If we were not to be exercised with various difficulties in our christian warfare, we should not keep close to the great captain of our salvation. If good men were not to live in fear of their enemies, it is probable that they would get into such a frame of spirit, as would set them at variance among themselves, and stir them up to bite and devour one another. *Homo homini lupus*: one man is a wolf to the other, if the love of God be not shed abroad and kept alive in his heart by the holy Ghost. If we were at peace with all the world, it is not unlikely that our affections would be so glued to this earth that we should say, "it is good to be here;" when our Lord bids us "arise and be gone." But He will take care to break the stubborn wills of his people here by the power of his grace, that they may not burn hereafter in the fire of his wrath. Sooner than God would let Israel pass straight to Canaan without the toil of journeyings or the experience of great hardships, He suffered them to wander "forty years in the wilderness to humble them."

“ them and to prove them, that he might know
 “ what was in their hearts.” *Deut. viii. 2.* So
 thou mayest pray, O poor believer, for the mor-
 tification of some lust that is in thee; that thy
 pride may be abased, or that thy most easily be-
 setting sin may have no more dominion over thee.
 Thou art sincere in thy prayer, and God in mer-
 cy hears thee. But what course doth He take
 to answer thee? Why, perhaps, by some very
 “ terrible thing.” It may be that He slays thy
 first-born, the wife of thy bosom, or thy best
 friend at a stroke. It may be that He permits
 thee to be despoiled of thy goods, to have thy
 good name aspersed, or to be wounded in the
 tenderest point in the world. Why? doth the
 Lord delight to cross and torment thee? No:
 but in kindness to thy soul He separates thee
 from thy idols, that they may not be as fuel to
 inflame thy corruptions, or as thieves to steal thy
 heart from him. Oh! the spiritual exaltation of
 God’s people is generally preceded by great suf-
 ferings. The suffering is the triumphant Christian.
 This was the language of the Spirit to the church
 of Smyrna when she was labouring under a most
 severe persecution, “ I know thy works, and
 “ tribulation, and poverty : but thou art rich :
 “ and he, who overcometh, shall not be hurted
 “ by the second death.” *Rev. ii. 9, 11.* St. Paul
 likewise tells us, “ that our light affliction, which
 “ is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more
 “ exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” *2 Cor.*
iv. 17. Peace and prosperity are the desire of all
 nations : but these blessings are seldom obtained
 without much bloodshed, or long enjoyed with-
 out many a hard conflict. So the comforts of
 religion are very sweet in themselves, and highly

to be prized : but the means, by which they are conveyed and secured to us, may be very bitter and trying. O then when the hand of the Lord is upon us, and the cross seems to pierce us even into our souls, let us bow in humble resignation to the divine will and say, “ the saints path to glory hath always been narrow and thorny. By terrible things hath God in general answered their prayers. But they have afterwards found that the valley of Achor was the door of hope. And oh ! shall we be dissatisfied with his dealings towards us, however grievous they may be to flesh and blood for a time, when they are productive of so much good to our spirits in the end ? shall we not kiss the rod, which scares away our sins and whips our corruptions to death ? Yes, Lord, in thy strength we will submit to all thy dispensations with cheerfulness, as knowing that they all proceed from righteousness, and are promotive of our best interest. In our severest exercises and under our most gloomy prospects we will still try to lay hold on thy word and on thy covenant, on thy promise and on thy grace as the God of our salvation.”

3. God answers the prayers of his people by terrible things because we are not so ready to receive the fruits of our prayers as we may imagine. Many prayers, as you have already heard, were made for the coming of our Lord in the flesh : but when he came, who could endure the day of his coming ? Great intercession was made for the possession of the promised land : but when the heirs of the promise were brought within the reach of that blessing, they would not go in to possess it : but they were for “ making captains
I “ that

“that they might return into Egypt.” *Num. xiv.*

4. In like manner we pray much for power to subdue our sins; but we are unwilling that they should be killed outright. They are so interwoven with our nature, that we are still too prone to love and cherish them. We pray for pardon; but we are loath to accept it with all its necessary consequences. We should be glad that the Saviour would do all things *for* us; but we would beg to be excused from suffering him to do any thing *in* us by his Spirit. Hence they, who were invited, would not come to the marriage supper. They had other business to mind. *Luke xiv. 18.* And our Lord told the inhabitants of Jerusalem that “he would have gathered them together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings: but they would not.”

Luke xiii. 34. His appearance did not answer their expectations. Because He only came to save them from their spiritual enemies, and not as a mighty conqueror to bring the whole world into subjection to *their* sway, they hid as it were their faces from him, they despised and esteemed him not. So we still pray for liberty, deliverance, and reformation: but when these things are offered to us, we reject them and will not have them, choosing rather to live in bondage, to hug our chains and to wallow in our pollutions. For this cause God gives us a potion of gall and wormwood, not only that our sins may be embittered to us, but that we may be willing to be delivered from them according to the tenor of our prayers. We have no relish for those spiritual privileges which believers enjoy till we have tasted them, however fervently we may pray for them: and therefore God condescends to open

our mouths by some cross or other, that we may taste the sweetness of his love for ourselves, and be led to cry out, " Lord, evermore give me " this bread. May I not only ask for it, but be " enabled to feed upon it from day to day. Be " it my continual aim not only to pray against " sin, but to be saved from it; not only to pray " for holiness, but to have it really implanted in " my heart; not only to pray to have an abun- " dant entrance into heaven at last, but to have " now such a meetness for it wrought in my " soul as may fit me for the society and delight- " ful employments of that happy place. O that " whenever I lift up my voice to the mercy-seat " I may have grace to wrestle with God for the " blessings which I need, and not to let him go " till he doth bless me!"

Lastly, God answers the prayers of his people by terrible things, partly because when they are in the greatest straits they are most expert and fervent in calling upon his name, and partly because it is his usual time to hear and save them when they are brought to see that they have no other help but in him. Gracious souls, when they smart under the anguish of the cross, *pray* in their prayer, or pour out their whole hearts before God. But even *they*, when they are at liberty and ease, free from pain and exempted from sufferings, are apt to rest in the form and to lose the spirit of prayer. They pour out words rather than humble supplications. Though there is an outward voice that speaks, yet there is no inward feeling that accompanies it. When they are rich and full they pray without a heart; but when they are destitute and needy, their prayer is a real expression of their wants. Their

tongues and their hearts are in perfect unison, when they are on their knees before God: and this is to pray indeed. At such times they have no other refuge into which they may flee. When they look around them, there is none that knows or owns them. They have no helper. None cares for their souls. Their hearts melt and faint within them. They can but lift up a wet eye and a blubbered face towards their merciful High Priest, and fix all their hopes upon his prevailing intercession and atoning death. And oh! if He doth condescend to pity and relieve them, when they are in this state of indigence and wretchedness; how do they prize the favour, and bless their great Deliverer's name. The least mercy is of the utmost value to them, when they feel themselves to be poor outcasts who are ready to perish. Just as the smallest boon is a rich present to a starved beggar at the door: he will be glad to procure a crust of dry bread, and will receive it with much thankfulness. Oh; if any of you, my friends, are at present in great anguish of spirit, and God seems to answer your prayers by terrible things in righteousness, take comfort, your deliverance is near. The Lord hath bound himself by a promise, that He will never utterly fail those, who seek him with their whole hearts. Hear his own words, and beg for faith to apply them to yourselves; "When the poor and needy
 "seek water, and there is none, and their tongue
 "faileth for thirst: I, the Lord, will hear them.
 "I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."
Isaiah xli. 17. Whosoever shall not be answered, you are in that condition that you are sure to succeed in your requests. Many passages of scripture might be produced to prove this. Take
 a few

a few instead of many. *Isaiah* calls the " heavens to sing, the earth to be joyful, and the mountains to break forth into singing." Why? Because " the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted." *Isai.* xlix. 13. David also, who well knew the sum and substance of prayer, and could readily call to mind those arguments which were most likely to prevail with God, thus addresses his heavenly Father; " I am poor and needy, make haste unto me, O my God; thou art my help and deliverer; O Lord, make no long tarrying." *Psalms* lxx. 5. He seems as if he had a claim to be heard in his need; or, as if God's truth would fail, if he returned without his errand from the throne of grace, when his case required immediate relief. And indeed God hath implanted such bowels of compassion even in us, as incline us to be more ready to assist the weak and the sickly than the strong and the healthy. Amidst all her children the tender-hearted mother knows no such orator in behalf of himself and others as the sick babe in the cradle. He must be served first let who will be neglected, because he cannot help himself, and his whole dependence is upon his mother. So our good and gracious God hath his eye and heart most intensely fixed upon the indigent and broken in spirit. He is perfectly acquainted with their respective conditions. He sees their sorrow for sin, and hears their groans under the burthen of their corruptions. He beholds how they are oppressed by worms like themselves, and considers that they are " like a lamp despised in the thought of him who is at ease." *Job* xii. 5. He needs not to be informed that few will take any notice of the

poor and destitute, unless it be to reproach and injure them; to tread them under foot and despitefully use them: and therefore he takes them under his own more immediate protection, spreads his banner of love over them, and hears the voice of their humble petitions. He commands believers "to deal their bread to the hungry, and "to bring the poor who are cast out into their "houses, to cover the naked and to satisfy the "the afflicted soul." *Isa.* lviii. 7, 10. Yes, he commands even his enemies to provide for his outcasts, saying: "let mine outcasts dwell with "thee, Moab, and be thou a covert to them "from the face of the spoiler." *Isa.* xvi. 4. And oh! if He thus commands both his friends and his foes to be attentive to their welfare; how much more will his own tender heart be inflamed with love towards them and anxiously concerned for their safety! It may be easily known who they are, whom God hath answered by terrible things in righteousness. They are so abased and sunk in their own esteem that of all persons in the world none have such mean views of themselves as they have, and none are so importunate in requesting a share in the prayers of their fellow christians. When they see those, who are possessed of great gifts rejoicing always in the Lord as they think, and walking towards Zion with great freedom in their spirits, subject to no fears and tied by no bonds: how glad are they to have such to pray for them! "Oh!" say they, "we beseech you to pray for us. We beg of "you to remember us before a throne of grace." Whereas the truth is, if we were to form our judgment according to the oracles of God; they, who are endued with great gifts, and whose spi-

rits are little exercised by crosses or temptations, have much greater need of the prayers of the tried and self-emptied christian than he hath of theirs. Oh! the poor in spirit are by far the best wrestlers between men and the true mediator Christ Jesus our Lord, because he will be sure to attend to their cries whosoever else shall be disregarded. Hear this, O thou afflicted soul, who art tossed with a tempest, and not comforted. Thou mayest be sometimes led to think that thou art forsaken of God, and to judge that he will cast thee off for ever. But oh! persevere in the path of duty. May strength be given thee to persevere in pouring out thy soul into the bosom of Jesus! Thou hast strong grounds to expect that thou shalt succeed at last, however long he may delay to hear thee or whatever obstacles may seem to be thrown in thy way. He hath said, that "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their suit." *Psal. cii. 17.* O plead his promise. Take no denial. Remember that "the terrible things," by which the Lord now answers thee, are thy fears, thy afflictions, and thy crosses. But oh! remember likewise that the sun of righteousness will soon arise upon thy distressed soul with consolation in his rays, when thou shalt break out into this song of praise. "My Saviour is come, and hath set my soul at large. I called upon Him in my trouble, and He hath delivered me out of my distress. It was he alone who could save me, I was past all human help. He hath silenced my doubts and allayed my fears. He hath spoken peace to my conscience. And I now plainly see that however dark or mysterious his past dealings might sometimes appear, they were all founded

“ in righteousness and conducive to my real good.
 “ O that I may have grace to glorify him by my
 “ future life, and to publish his mercy to the
 “ miserable with my dying breath !”

All, that now remains, is to conclude the whole with a brief application. We may plainly gather from what hath been said upon the words of the text, that the Lord doth at all times and in all circumstances hear and answer the prayers of his people. However unlikely many things may seem unto us to be an answer of our prayer, yet when the whole plan of divine providence is unravelled and we can trace every link of it respecting us through its several gradations, we shall see that those terrible things, which often carried such a formidable aspect to the eyes of our frail nature, were necessary for us, and that we could not do without them. David said in his haste, “ I am cut off from before thine eyes :” nevertheless he afterwards saw great reason to own that God always “ heard the voice of his supplication, “ when he cried unto him.” *Psal.* xxxi. 22. How long did Israel lament, and sink under their oppression in Egypt, as if God had forgotten to be gracious, or had given them over to the will of their enemies? Yet their deliverance at length came, and they were given to understand, that none of their cries were vain and that none of their groans had escaped unnoticed. The prayers of his people are enrolled before the most High, and registered in the book of his remembrance; that He may answer each of them in that time and way, which He knows to be most useful and salutary to their souls. Hence Solomon prayed, “ Let these my words, wherewith I have
 “ made supplication before the Lord, be nigh
 “ unto

" unto the Lord our God day and night; that
 " he may maintain the cause of his servant and
 " the cause of his people Israel, as the matter
 " shall require." *1 Kings* viii. 59. They " come
 " up for a memorial before God." *Acts* x. 4.
 It is one of his distinguishing attributes that " He
 " is a God who heareth prayer." And He not
 only hears but remembers their petitions, and
 bears them uppermost on his all-capacious mind.
 O how great and numerous are the motives which
 are left upon record in the word of truth to ani-
 mate us to persevere in prayer, how disastrous,
 cloudy, or terrible soever things may appear
 within us or without us! Long did Abraham
 pray for a son; yet both he and his wife grew
 old and past the age of child-bearing, before they
 were seemingly heard: when they might have
 been ready to discontinue their suit because of
 their ill success, a son was given them, who
 sprang not so much from nature as from the pro-
 mise of God. The same may be observed with
 regard to Zecharias and Elizabeth. And there
 are some now who cry under the altar above,
 whose prayers have been long heard, but are still
 unanswered. Learn hence, my afflicted and dis-
 console friends, not to judge that your prayers
 have not been heard, because they are yet not an-
 swered; or to think hard of God, because He may
 have answered some of them by terrible things.
 All his works are wrought in righteousness.
 There is mercy blended with wisdom in every
 part of his conduct towards us. He could not
 otherwise be the God of our salvation. There
 may be many in this congregation who pray to
 God each day of their lives; yea, with the psalmist,
 seven times in the day: yet they may be often
 quite

quite disheartened, because they may seem to derive so little benefit from their prayers. As the ungodly fancy that their sins shall never be laid to their charge, or brought to remembrance against them, because vengeance is asleep or slow to overtake them: so do many gracious souls imagine in their distress that the great Jehovah hath quite disregarded or neglected them, when He doth not answer their prayers with that tenderness and love which they could wish. Many a time have such been heard to pour forth their dismal cries and bitter wailings in this or the like strain; “ Oh! if the high and lofty one
 “ were to hear my prayer and to accept my per-
 “ son in Christ Jesus, I would with David call
 “ upon him as long as I lived. But oh! I am
 “ such a bruised reed and unworthy creature,
 “ that I am afraid that God will never incline
 “ his ear unto me, but will soon cast me out of
 “ his blissful presence, as I confess that I most
 “ richly deserve. I am almost utterly dispirited,
 “ and ready to give up all expectation of deliv-
 “ erance. Alas! alas! what shall I do! I beg for
 “ mercy, and taste wrath. I beg for grace, and
 “ feel corruption. I beg for ease, and receive
 “ pain and trouble. I beg for love, and find
 “ hatred. Every thing runs the wrong way.
 “ God hath shut out my prayer from the sanctu-
 “ ary of his presence: and I fear that He will
 “ exclude me for ever from having any more
 “ access unto him.” Hold, hold thy tongue, poor soul, and I will try to speak a word that may be more suitable to thy case. The answer of the saint’s prayer is not to be measured by our surmises or the suggestions of our dark minds, but by the plain declarations of God’s word, which
 repeatedly

repeatedly testifies that the groanings of his oppressed, the anguish of his tempted, and the desires of his needy members are before the Lord night and day. And when He delays to answer them, He doth not deny their requests. Many, as well as David, have long complained before they sped, "I am weary of my crying. My throat is dry. Mine eyes fail, while I wait upon my God." *Psal. lxxix. 3.* Paul was forced to endure the buffetings of Satan, and to carry the thorn in his flesh to his dying day as far as I know, notwithstanding his loud and frequent cries to get rid of such troublesome inmates. Moses could not enter into the land of Canaan, however earnestly he might desire it: but he was admitted into heaven, which was much better. So mayest thou, O mourning soul, write bitter things against thyself, because God doth not seem to hear thy complaints or to answer thy petitions. But notwithstanding the bitterness of all thy self-reflections, know to thy comfort, that if thou hast been taught by God's dealings with thee to distrust thine own heart, to be vile in thine own eyes, and to take no idolatrous delight in creature comforts, thou hast received a ten thousand times better answer to thy prayers, than if thou hadst been lifted up by glad frames, or hadst obtained thy fond wish in every prayer. The lowly graces of the Spirit thrive best under heavy crosses. Israel increased and multiplied exceedingly, while they were oppressed by Pharaoh: they were but seventy souls, when they went down into Egypt; but in the course of a little more than two centuries, they became "six hundred thousand who were men, besides women and children." So the people of God

grow

grow in tribulation; and the divine life flourishes most in their souls, when it is watered with the tears of penitence and steeped in the Saviour's blood. The fish increase more in the salt than in the fresh water. We have in general the most plentiful summer, after the coldest winter. The camomile smells best after it hath been trodden down. Oh! when doth the spouse of Christ appear more glorious in his eyes, than when "she forgets her own people and her father's house." *Psal.* xlv. 10. With divine love sparkling in his eyes He then addresses her, and saith "O my dove, who art in the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. O let me hear thee calling upon me and sweetly singing to my praise." *Cant.* ii. 14. The most precious grain lies under the furrow, when it is frost and snow. So the terrible things, by which God answers some of your prayers, may be only intended to prevent much mischief to your souls, to break down your self wills, that He may make you happy in a sense of his love. Because you are prone to "go after your lovers, He may therefore hedge up your way with thorns, and make a wall that you may not find your paths." *Hos.* ii. 6. It is a mercy if the wall of the commandments will keep you from transgressing them: but if this will not do, the Lord will raise a wall of affliction, as a fence against sin. I have read that Augustine saved his life by losing his way: had he taken the course which he had proposed, he would have fallen into the hands of an assassin who way-laid him there. And if you were not by some trou-

ble or other sometimes put out of your usual track, you might fall into some sin where you least expected it, which should prove very destructive to your peace as well as injurious to your souls. Salt prevents putrefaction, while honey promotes it. *Gregory* tells us, that Solomon left the house of wisdom for want of being conversant in the school of affliction. Let these considerations reconcile you, my friends, to your respective allotments. And oh! it is no small matter often that can do this. For, though you may think that you have no will of your own, while you experience neither ebbings in your souls nor scarcity in your chests; yet when God answers your prayers by terrible things, and disappoints you in those pursuits on which you have set your hearts; you find an old will still alive within you, which wrestles hard for the mastery, and cannot be overcome without great grace and much struggle. There must be strong physick used to purge out this old leaven. When God therefore answers your prayers by terrible things, He employs these things as the most proper means to mortify and subdue your remaining corruptions. "By this," saith He, "shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away sin, when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk stones which are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up." *Isa.* xxvii. 9. When physicians prescribe any medicine for us, they are not sure what effect it will have upon our bodies in the operation: it may do us more hurt than good. But the great Physician of souls knows exactly what to apply, in order to bring about a cure, to mortify our particular corrup-

tion and to expel our particular disease. He casts out of us nothing but what is evil. And though his medicines may be sometimes bitter as aloes to our palate; yet if they serve to kill the worms of pride, envy, and discontent in our hearts, we have reason to bless God for them, and to consider them as marks of his love. When we are thus humbled under the mighty hand of God, it is that He may exalt us in due time. No harm can happen unto us, while we are kept in these lowly vallies. Bear up then, my brethren, under all your trials and crosses. However sour the bud may be, the flower will be sweet, when it comes to be full-blown and expanded under the warm beams of the sun of righteousness. The most terrible part of a Christian's experience not only prevent much mischief, but produce much good. Many have reason still to say with David, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted." Manasseh reaped much greater advantage from his chains than from his crown. The Lord always "chastens his people for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness." *Heb. xii. 10* Distress likewise increases union among the brotherhood. When we are at ease in Zion, our love is apt to wax cold, and a slight dislike separates very friends: but common danger drives us together for common security; just as the shepherd's dog keeps the sheep from scattering, and makes them to run together in a herd into the fold. The fire of contention commits abundantly more havock in the church of Christ than the fire of persecution. The former checks its growth, but the latter promotes it. *Luther* observes that there is a great difference between a Divine who takes up

his cross daily, or is like his master, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and a divine who lives in pomp and splendour. It is a very uncommon thing for a man's eyes, like Jonathan's, to be opened by eating honey, or by enjoying great prosperity; but many have had their eyes opened by the clay of adversity, which is the means that the Lord often uses to give sight to the blind. The poor and the miserable, like those "who go down to the sea in ships and do their business in great waters, see the works of the Lord and discover his wonders *in the deep.*"

Psal. cvii. 23, 24. See then, believers, what reason you have to bless God for all his dispensations towards you. Whether they be adverse or prosperous, bitter or sweet, terrible or amiable, He makes them all to work together for your good. You may sing of judgment as well as of mercy. O that we could be but more complying to his will! O that we could always look through all second causes to the first great cause, and consider every event both in the kingdom of nature and in the kingdom of grace, as directed by his wisdom and intended for the benefit of his people! This would not only teach us in whatever state we are therewith to be content, but it would let out many of those wayward humours, which still remain within us. We should be no longer fretful and peevish. We could not repine at our lot, if we viewed it as God's appointment to us. We should be happy in ourselves. We should bear love unfeigned to the brethren: and instead of repining at the short-lived prosperity of the wicked, we should see abundant reason to pity them, and to pray for them. For if we, who are the children of God by adoption and grace,

grace, are so often distressed and perplexed in this
 valley of tears: what must *they* endure who are
 strangers to his salvation, when they come to suf-
 fer all his wrath in the regions of the damned!
 If God answers *us* now by terrible things in righ-
 teousness, when we are under the covert of the
 Redeemer's wings; what vials of vengeance must
 be poured upon *them* in the great day of his ap-
 pearing, when they shall have no shelter from the
 storm, but shall be left exposed to all the hot
 thunder-bolts of incensed justice! Let them alone.
 If we have Christ formed in our hearts as the
 hope of glory, we have, with all our crosses and
 difficulties a far better portion than the unsancti-
 fied possession of the whole world. Be our allot-
 ment here ever so afflictive or uneasy, we can lift
 up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our
 salvation, and can amidst our sorest conflicts say,
 "Yonder is my home. Here I am only a pil-
 "grim: and it signifies little what hardships I
 "shall endure by the way during my passage
 "through this dreary wilderness, when this short
 "winter day shall so soon end in a long eternal
 "day of rest and happiness. My crown is al-
 "most in view. I will therefore maintain the
 "fight unshaken against a host of corruptions,
 "strong in the Lord and in the power of his
 "might, that being refined from all my dross
 "and made white in the blood of the Lamb, I
 "may dwell for ever with the God of my salva-
 "tion." May these be the views and may these
 be the resolutions of every one who hears me this
 day! God grant it for his mercy's sake. Amen
 and Amen.

